

# The Parthian Shot

Kingship and Coinage in the Early Arsacid Empire



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# Index

Introduction.....	3
Preliminaries .....	5
Chapter 1. History of the Parthian empire.....	10
Cultures in the Parthian Empire.....	12
Chapter 2.What is culture? An anthropological analysis .....	14
Culture as a concept .....	14
Culture in the Hellenistic East: What is ‘Greekness’? .....	15
Chapter 3. Coins and kings: The numismatic analysis.....	18
Part 1: Coinage before Mithradates I .....	18
Eastern and Seleucid coinage.....	18
Parthian coinage .....	19
Titles on pre-Mithradatic coinage .....	20
Part 2: Coinage under Mithradates I .....	21
The Diadem.....	21
Titles and Epitheta.....	25
The ruler cult in the Parthian empire .....	27
The king´s beard.....	30
The royal archer .....	33
Other aspects of change .....	37
Part 3: Numismatics after Mithradates I .....	40
Phraates II .....	40
Inter-regnal issue .....	41
Artabanos I.....	41
Chapter 4. The culture of kingship.....	43
Conclusion .....	46
Literature.....	50
Plates.....	53

# Introduction

Most archaeologists will be familiar with the thrill of finding a coin in their excavation. It is an excellent way to date the structure that is being excavated and it provides vital information about those who had inhabited it. Historians use it to talk about the economic situation of a region, citing things like metal content and amount of coins minted, as well as where they have been found. They are always an interesting marker of civilization and development, and they present us with a wonderful, tangible piece of evidence that bring the antiquities closer to our experience.

In this thesis we will use the coinage of the early Arsacids, also known as the Parthian kings, to take a closer look at the subject of the royal image. The Parthian empire was vast and grew explosively: the Arsacids managed to overtake Seleucid territory, and time and again fended off their former feudal overlords. In the end, they survived, and while the Seleucid dynasty eventually disappeared, the Parthians remained a formidable force, enemies to small states as well as the Roman Empire. We rightfully call it the Parthian Empire.

We have a diversity of sources when it comes to learning about the Parthians. There are Greek inscriptions, cuneiform texts, and accounts written by Greek and Roman authors; there are archaeological findings, from cities like Susa and Nisa; and we have coins. We have coins in such abundance that they have become the largest and most important source of information on the Parthian Empire. The Arsacids managed to uphold a standard of minting for many years, making their coins recognizable and widely-used. Their continuity is striking, but the amount of detail that the mints were able to incorporate in the coinage causes every separate type to be of interest.

It is with these ideas in mind that I wish to present this research. For all our sources and knowledge, scholarship about the Parthian Empire has lagged behind when it comes to questions of identity and kingship. While study of coinage remains interesting, of course, this paper will ask questions that are in line with current Hellenistic scholarship. What can we say about culture when it comes to the Parthians? Can we use coinage to deduce anything about the way in which the Parthian court interacted with its multi-cultural subjects? And can we say anything about ideas of kingship in the early Parthian Empire? We will look at the royal image and the idea of empire within the Parthian Empire itself. To do this, we will look at coins from the earliest days of the Arsacids through to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. It will be centered on the figure of Mithradates I, who established what we can truly call the ‘Parthian Empire’. He was able to take over most of the Seleucid territory and started a four-hundred-year Parthian reign in the area of Iran. He moved his army from their homeland in Parthia and went south and west, firmly into the Seleucid heartland. What he ended up with, after a thirty-year rule, was autonomy from the Seleucids and an empire several times larger than Parthia had ever been before.

In doing this, we see some noticeable changes in his coinage. In order to put these changes into context, we will look at the period immediately preceding Mithradates’ reign; in order to see whether they had a lasting effect, I will also look at what happened with the first two of his descendants, Phraates II and Artabano I. After these kings Mithradates II started ruling. Nicknamed ‘the Great’, he made such drastic changes that he started a new era within

the empire. This is a natural cut-off: Mithradates II started a new kind of reign, expanding the Empire after a period of unrest and diminished territory. He also adopted a very different visual language from the period before.

Because coins play such a vital role in this thesis, it seems only right to look at the material thematically, not chronologically. This means each chapter will treat a different theme, in which the order will be chronological. In the first part of the paper, we will briefly discuss numismatic particulars such as the matter of ‘propaganda’ on coin, as well as giving some background information on Parthian history and the Parthian people.

In the second part of the paper we will start looking at the actual coins. First, we will look at the coinage before Mithradates I, from the start of the dynasty on. Then, we will look at Mithradates’ coinage itself. This chapter will be divided into several subchapters, in which we will examine the changes in legends, iconography and physiognomy. Then, we will see what happened after the death of Mithradates, up until the ascent to the throne of Mithradates II.

The last part of the paper will consist of a synthesis. We need to look at the phenomenon of culture, and how culture changed during the Hellenistic time. We will see whether Mithradates’ coinage had any influence on the newly conquered people, and whether we can say the changes were influenced by strife. At the end of the paper, we will have come to a better understanding of how coins were used in the early Parthian empire to communicate ideas, and we will know more about how the character of the Parthian kingdom changed when it went from a local power to an empire.

# Preliminaries

Before we can delve deeper into the world of Parthian numismatics, it is necessary to discuss several preliminary issues. We will discuss propaganda and the place coinage has in it; we will look at the reason metal currency was minted; and we will see what other sources we have when talking about the Parthian Empire.

## The propaganda question

There have been many vigorous discussions concerning the word ‘propaganda’. While it is widely understood by ancient historians that this is an anachronistic word to use, in some cases it should be considered of greater benefit to use it than to create a plastic, unnatural sounding alternative. The word ‘propaganda’ resonates with audiences in such a way that it needs little extra explaining.

Although originally, the term was used to advance adherence to papal doctrines, we now mostly associate it with Nazi Germany.<sup>1</sup> Because of these associations it has become a negative word in the minds of many people, when it does not necessarily have to be. In my opinion, using other words that mean the exact same thing distract from the matters at hand, the point you want to make and the research you are doing. Instead of inventing alternatives we could simply strip away the negative connotations and look at the word in a purer form. Historians and numismatists that concern themselves with matters of propaganda see the word mostly as a useful tool to explain certain concepts to audiences. Although it is difficult to define propaganda exactly, an influential and important definition was made by Jacques Ellul, in a book written in an attempt to explain propaganda. He defined it as:

“The educational effort or information used by an organized group that is made available to a selected audience, for the specific purpose of making the audience take a particular course of action or conform to a certain attitude desired by the organized group.”<sup>2</sup>

This definition has been used by historians when investigating the use of propaganda in antiquity, and has proven itself useful in this way.<sup>3</sup>

Ideas, and the way in which they are projected, are always part of a communication between several parties. What is eventually used has been shaped by communication with the subjects of the ruler, as well as with enemies, neighbors and pretenders to the throne. And while the ruler’s intention is to assert power, it is always possible that there is a miscommunication or a misreading of the symbols. It is therefore important that the symbols are stated as clearly as possible, and will speak to the group—which, it should always be kept in mind, is never homogeneous and as such not everyone will react the same way to the same image. But it is the ruler’s duty to try and coax a positive reaction from as many people as possible: after all, after territory has been conquered, the minds of people also have to be conquered. In antiquity, as well as in modern times, the groups that were most susceptible to propaganda

<sup>1</sup> R. Fowler, O. Hekster, ‘Imagining kings: From Persia to Rome’, in: R. Fowler, O. Hekster, (eds.), *Imaginary kings: Royal images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome* (München 2005) 9–38, 17.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ellul, *Propaganda: the formation of men’s attitudes* (New York 1973).

<sup>3</sup> For example, J. DeRose Evans, *The art of persuasion: Political propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus* (Ann Arbor 1992).

were part of the higher classes. The reason for this is that those classes are more ‘in tune’, so to say, with the whole of society. They have the leisure time to actively participate in culture, and their education will cause them to have more points of exposure.<sup>4</sup> However, this does not mean that a group will agree to something as long as the propaganda is clever enough: ideas that lie too far from the original culture and ideology will most often fail.<sup>5</sup>

The Hellenistic age in particular is characterized by the development of a theory of ‘king-like’ behavior. What a king does and looks like started to be subject to certain rules and preconceptions.<sup>6</sup> Some of these rules had to do with looking like a king, others with qualities a king should have that no one else has (divine qualities, such as healing, can be part of this). The biggest part of these rules, perhaps ironically, lay in the past. Imitation of previous rulers, or at least the pretense that the ruler’s actions had their origin in the past, was the surest way to gain acceptance. But in the end, being in tune with the population is always instrumental. If the subjects do not care for a king who values war then a king who seems to value war will not have any success with these people. And it is of vital importance that the people feel that their ruler has their best interest in mind and that he shares their values. If a ruler fails to do this, he can be sure of an unsuccessful reign.

### **Coin as propaganda**

How do coins fit into this message? After all, they are used as a means of payment. Can they really be seen as a message from the ruler?

The simple answer is: yes. After all, why would the iconography on coins be so complex, with titles, deities and symbols of kingship, if not to convey a message? There is no reason for any of these things if they were not seen as symbols. There are still some scholars that do not believe that numismatic material had a specific goal, or who do not believe that coins could convey any message of real worth. However, most of those who study numismatics are convinced that there is real meaning to coins. Before we even touch on the actual iconography on coins, they are already symbols of other things: tax authority and economic power. Without coins, the regime would have no economic power in the everyday lives of its subjects.

Now, why would there have been action from the rulers themselves to put a certain image or name on coins? The specific meaning changes according to propagandistic program and ruler, but the overall ideal is clear: to give the ruler presence amongst his subjects. This worked both ways: the ruler became part of his subjects’ lives, but he also gave meaning to the bits of metal. Without his face or name on it, there was little actual meaning in these coins. The use of coins with a ruler’s image stamped on them also legitimized the ruler’s position, and is a marker of the acceptance of his authority, as well as acceptance of the worth of the coins and the bullion they were made from.<sup>7</sup> In this way, coins are an irrational type of propaganda: that is to say, they appeal to emotions and impressions instead of using hard facts

<sup>4</sup> DeRose Evans, *The art of persuasion*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Fowler and Hekster, ‘Imagining Kings’, 26-29, for a discussion on the appearance and acts of Hellenistic kings.

<sup>7</sup> Fowler, Hekster, ‘Imagining kings’, 25. This has also been studied by Roman numismatists, who found that there were certain periods of economic instability in which the emperor’s portrait was instrumental in keeping the peace amongst subjects. See: J. Lendon, ‘The face on the coins and inflation in Roman Egypt’, *Klio* 72 (1990) 106-134.

in order to persuade the people who use them.<sup>8</sup>

The Parthian kings were in a similar position. Especially Mithradates I, who had conquered large amounts of land during his reign, needed to consolidate his reign. As we will see later, it was necessary for him to please both the people of his own country as well as those who had a Greek background. For a king whose origins lay in an Iranian nomadic tribe, this must not have been easy. As such, it was necessary for Mithradates to send out a clear message, one that conveyed his identity. The royal image is, as has been remarked, a ‘surrogate’ for actual royal presence.<sup>9</sup> What is good about this surrogate that it can project an idealized version of the ruler: after all, a physically disabled king can have himself pictured as able-bodied on his propagandistic material, and only few people will ever be the wiser. That is why coins are so important when doing research, not only in a society where they are almost all we have, but in *every* case.

### Who minted

We are far from sure who decided on the iconography on coinage. It is tempting to see the hand of the king himself in these proceedings, but it is unlikely he was directly involved in all of the details himself. Although we do not have enough information to come to any conclusions about the process in the Hellenistic East, it is perhaps useful to look to the Rome, especially Imperial Rome, where we have much more information. Even there it is a tenuous process, and it is a debate that is long from being finished, but we might have a little more of an indication. Some scholars studying Roman numismatics have theorized that it was the employees of the mint who wished to honor the emperor by making fantastic coins.<sup>10</sup> However, this seems unlikely; from a logical standpoint this could potentially lead to differences between the emperor’s ideology and that portrayed on coins; also, research has proven that the differences between emperors are too great for the decision to have come from the mint itself.<sup>11</sup> What seems more likely is that the emperor made clear what kind of an ideological program he would follow, after which the mint either made its own designs, or someone in the emperor’s inner circle would communicate the further details to the mint.<sup>12</sup>

Either way, we know that if a coin is minted, it has passed the control of officials; as such, it must have conformed to the ideas of kingship that were held at the court, if not by the king himself.<sup>13</sup> Even if it was designed by someone at the mint itself, the image would still have been approved by someone at the court. In fact, any kind of message should be seen as a reflection of the court, not just as a reflection of the king.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> DeRose Evans, *The art of persuasion*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>10</sup> B. Levick, ‘Propaganda and the imperial coinage’, *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 104-116.

<sup>11</sup> For example, T.V. Buttrey, ‘Vespasian as moneyer’, *Numismatic Chronicle* 7 12 (1972) 33-58, or D. Weigel, ‘Gallienus’ ‘animal series’ coins and Roman religion’ *Numismatic Chronicle* 150 (1990) 135-143.

<sup>12</sup> R. Wolters, ‘Die Geschwindigkeit der Zeit und die Gefahr der Bilder: Münzbilder und Münzpropaganda in der römischen Kaiserzeit’ in: G. Weber, M. Zimmermann (eds.), *Propaganda-Selbstdarstellung-Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreich des 1 Jhs. N. Chr.* (Stuttgart 2003) 176-204; C. F. Noreña, *Imperial ideals in the Roman West: Representation, circulation, power* (Cambridge and New York 2011).

<sup>13</sup> R. Fleischer, ‘Hellenistic royal iconography on coins’ in: P. Bilde e.a. (eds.), *Aspects of Hellenistic kingship* (Aarhus 1996) 28-40.

<sup>14</sup> R. Strootman, ‘Dynastic courts of the Hellenistic empires’. Accessed through [https://www.academia.edu/3331427/Dynastic\\_Courts\\_of\\_the\\_Hellenistic\\_Empires](https://www.academia.edu/3331427/Dynastic_Courts_of_the_Hellenistic_Empires), 24-06-2014.

## **Who used coins?**

Typically, coined money was used to pay soldiers with. It has even been theorized that that was the reason coins were originally invented: soldiers had no way to practice another trade while they were involved in a military campaign, and trading was not a possibility while on the road. But as trade routes developed and a standard developed, it also became common for people in trade centers (such as cities) to frequently use coins. The Attic standard that developed in Classical Attica became the norm for a broad region.<sup>15</sup> The Parthian drachms and tetradrachms were also subject to this standard.<sup>16</sup> This meant that those coins all had the same weight, and the same precious metal to non-precious metal ratio. Open monetary systems could do trade relatively easily in that way. Regions with a closed monetary system (i.e., they did not conform to an outside standard, but they maintained their own) also used coinage. However, they would either melt down the metal of coins that entered the market (as was done in Ptolemaic Egypt), or use conversion rates.<sup>17</sup> Coined money became more important as international relations built and interaction between large autonomous powers increased. And although the main reason they were coined may still have been to pay soldiers with, this was far from the only reason to mint in the Hellenistic Age. Coined money became a way of communication, and even small, non-violent cities and kingdoms saw the need for metal currency.

## **Other sources**

While this paper is concerned with numismatic material, there are several other sources that can be used when talking about the Parthians.

**Archaeology** has given us some very interesting findings. Nisa especially has remained archaeologically interesting for the past 30 years or so. Excavations there started in the 1980's, under Soviet leadership, and was taken over by an Italian campaign in 1990. Antonio Invernizzi has been the leading archaeologist on these campaigns, which continue to this day. The aim has largely been to make a general topographical map of old Nisa and to learn the relationships between each building of the fortress located in the south part of Nisa.<sup>18</sup> These excavations have taught us many new things about the Parthians, especially about how they used their buildings. Ostraka and parts of statues have also shown us day-to-day life and artistic sensibilities. One of the most spectacular finds has been a clay face, probably depicting either Mithradates I or Mithradates II. It was found in a space called the ‘round hall’ presumably a space that had an official or ritual function.

**Cuneiform** documents give us incredibly valuable first-hand information about the day-to-day life of the administration. Large amounts of them have been found in Babylon, Susa and Selukia-Ktesiphon. Amongst other things, they give us information about Parthian rulership in Babylon. In fact, Babylonian cuneiform documents announced Mithradates I as ruler of the area.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, this source of information only helps us to learn more about this particular area of the Parthian empire, and little else.

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<sup>15</sup> C. Howgego, *Ancient history from coins* (London 1995) 50.

<sup>16</sup> D. Sellwood, *An introduction to the coinage of Parthia* (London 1971) 5.

<sup>17</sup> Howgego, *Ancient history from coins*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> <http://parthia.com/nisa/> accessed 26-5-2014.

<sup>19</sup> The best source for Parthian cuneiform documents are gathered in: M. R. Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians : political ideology in post-Hellenistic and late antique Persia* (Cambridge 2011).

**Literature** is often fragmented, but the Parthians were a popular subject amongst contemporary writers. Isidore of Charax wrote about the geography of the Parthian empire in his *Mansiones Parthicae*. The most important writers, by whom we have substantial amounts of work left, are Polybios, Strabo and Plutarch. Polybios talks about the Parthians in his *Historiae*, Strabo travelled widely and knew about the Parthians from his travels and Plutarch mentions them as part of Marcus Antonius' war against the Parthians.<sup>20</sup> Other writers have similarly contributed to our knowledge about the Parthians, amongst whom we count Pliny the Elder, Cassius Dio, and Pompeius Trogus.<sup>21</sup> Justin has been one of the most valuable writers for students of Parthian history, especially for the earliest history.<sup>22</sup> Flavius Josephus, who recounted the history of the Jewish people, gives more elaborate information about the Parthians within the context of war.<sup>23</sup> We also have fragments of Arrian's *Parthika*, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but most of this work has been lost.

The problem with most of these works is that they were written by outsiders. Often they were not just outsiders, they were actually enemies or had been (in)directly harmed by the actions of the Parthians. For this reason we should always be cautious when citing these primary sources. Another problem for our own situation is that none of the writers was active during the time we are discussing here. As such, the earliest accounts were written during the mid-first century BCE. Nothing earlier is available to us, and most of the sources were written much later than that.

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<sup>20</sup> Pol. *Hist.*; Strab.; Plut. *Ant.*

<sup>21</sup> Pliny *HN*; Cass. Dio; Just. *Epit.*

<sup>22</sup> Just.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph. *AJ*.

# Chapter 1

## History of the Parthian empire

For several centuries the Parthians ruled regions spanning Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, sometimes even branching out into Gaza and Palestine. On Plate 1, we see a rough illustration of the extent of the Parthian Empire around 100BCE. Although the role of the Parthians within history is often underestimated, they did play a pivotal role in the dismantling of the powerful Seleucid empire. Nowadays, they are best known for the nuisance they posed for the Romans. Although that part of their history is equally interesting, in this short review of Parthian history we will look at events until roughly the mid-second century BCE.

The origin of the Parthians as a cultural and ethnic group is shady. Linguistic and anthropological research based on portraiture has given us very little to work with.<sup>24</sup> Their presumed nomadic origins have not made it easier to settle on a possible location of origin. From several lists preserved, however, we know that Parthians had been satraps under Persian rule for several centuries. The first indigenous Iranian mention of Parthia as a region is in the Behistun inscription. The region should be between Hecatompyleos and Drangiana.<sup>25</sup> We also know that there was a Parthian unit in the Persian army that was defeated by Alexander the Great in Arbela in 331 BCE.<sup>26</sup>

After the death of Alexander the Great, Parthia became a Seleucid satrapy. It was relatively peaceful until the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, when Arsakes I and his brother Tiridates, inspired by a Bactrian king, revolted against the Seleucid ruler.<sup>27</sup> Starting from 247 BCE, Arsaces and Tiridates led a revolt against Andragoras, who was himself a satrap of Antiochos II Theos<sup>28</sup>. Through the use of an alliance with the Bactrian kingdom the Parthian rulers, by this time crowned, gained more strength. Their armies, too, rose in numbers. And although the Seleucids made attempts, as in 228 BCE, to subdue the Parthians, domestic troubles would pull their attention elsewhere. This allowed the Parthians to focus on claiming more and more land. Under the leadership of Tiridates the Parthian army was able to build several new cities and march slowly forward.

Upon the death of Tiridates in 211 BCE, however, the Seleucid king Antiochus III once again moved eastward. He drove the Parthian troops back. This aggressive approach of the Seleucids caused the Parthians to lose the center of Syrinx, and before the Seleucid army overtook the city the Parthians put to death all the Greek inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> Although the reason is not sure, the next we hear Antiochus was trying to make peace and forge an alliance with Artabanos, son of Tiridates.

Tiridates was succeeded in 191 by Priapatius, who in turn was succeeded by his son

<sup>24</sup> N.C. Debevoise, *A political history of Parthia* (New York 1968) 1.

<sup>25</sup> J.M. Cook, ‘The rise of the Achaemenids and establishment of their Empire’ in: I. Gershevitch, *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge 1985) 200-291, 248.

<sup>26</sup> Arr. Anab. 3.11; Curt. Ruf. 4.12.11.

<sup>27</sup> Just. 41.4.

<sup>28</sup> U. Ellerbrock, S. Winkelmann, *Die Parther. Die vergessene Großmacht* (Darmstadt 2012) 48.

<sup>29</sup> Debevoise, *Political history of Parthia*, 18.

Phraates, who died early<sup>30</sup>. He left the throne to his brother Mithradates instead of his sons, in 171 BCE.<sup>31</sup> This king quickly started a policy of expansion, alarming Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was at that moment at war in the Western part of the empire. He came as far as Persepolis, but Antiochus died shortly afterwards.

The Parthian king did not let that stop him; he moved steadily into Elymais in Media, starting a war that lasted from 161 BCE through 155 BCE. When the war resulted in a victory for Mithradates, Mesopotamia was the next target. By 141, Mithradates had entered Seleucia, and was recognized as king.

This was not the last the Parthians would hear from the Seleucids. In fact, as soon as Mithradates and his troops were occupied elsewhere, Demetrios II Nicator advanced with the help of recently conquered peoples (most notably the Greek parts of it). Although he won several victories over the Parthians, he was eventually defeated, humiliated and then married to one of Mithradates' daughters. The disobedience of the cities that had helped Demetrios was punished duly. Mithradates also fought successfully against the Medes and the Elymaeans.<sup>32</sup> Shortly after Mithradates had conquered Susa, another great centre, he passed away in 138/37 BCE.<sup>33</sup> At his death, his empire comprised Parthia, Hyrcania, Media, Babylonia, Assyria, Elymais, possibly Persis, and Tapuria and Traxiana.

Mithradates was succeeded by his son, Phraates II. It was during his reign that the Seleucids made another impressive attempt on Parthian territory. In 130 BCE Antiochus VII Sidetes set out with a large army. It was a success: three large battles were won by the Seleucid monarch, and several Parthian dependencies joined the Seleucid effort. When Phraates asked for them, the terms of peace proposed by Antiochus were so outrageous that the Parthian king refused; the only condition he met was sending Antiochus' brother, Demetrios, along with a squadron. This did not do enough to appease the Seleucid king, but he was unpleasantly surprised by the local populace. After months of serving as garrison cities they finally turned pro-Parthian and contributed to the flight of Antiochus, and the subsequent defeat of the king by the Parthian troops. After his death no other Seleucid monarch emerged strong enough to do significant damage to Parthian territory.

Between Phraates II and his successor Artabanos I there were several years (127-125 BCE) in which we are not sure who (if anyone) reigned. It is possible that there was a king for several months, because we have in issue of coinage—however, that could simply have been the mints themselves, re-striking coins from the days of Mithradates I. Whatever the case, between 127 and 125 BCE, Artabanos I became king. Artabanos was the son of Phriapitius, and a brother to Phraates I and Mithradates I. Because of his short reign, we know relatively little about him, except that he had to contend with several crises and was eventually killed by an arrow in battle.

After Artabanos, Mithradates II ascended the throne. He was one of the greatest Parthian kings, known for extending and consolidating the empire, as did Mithradates I. He started a new era, and with that came a new set of symbols and ways to communicate with his

<sup>30</sup> Just. 41.5.

<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates the autocracy of the Parthian king—not custom, but the king decided who would inherit the throne.

<sup>32</sup> Just. 41.6.

<sup>33</sup> Although proof of Parthian control over Susa only appears in 130, but historians agree that Mithradates probably conquered it himself. See: Debevoise, *Political history*, 26.

subjects. Because of the radical changes he eventually made, we will not take his reign into consideration. What we see, for example, is that the iconography under Mithradates II became much more Iranian, including the adoption of an elaborate tiara. Several things remain the same, but the break with his forebears is significant enough that we can draw few conclusions about the preceding time by studying him.

In conclusion, we have seen that the Parthian kings who followed Mithradates I were the rulers of a far-flung empire with inhabitants from many different cultures and backgrounds. How Mithradates and his successors dealt with the new territory, as well as the new groups of people, will be explored in the rest of this paper.

### Cultures in the Parthian Empire

It is clear by now that the culture of the Parthian empire must have been multi-faceted, large as it was. This section will feature a brief sketch of the culture and religions of the main populations, in order to come to a better understanding of how the cultural elements displayed on Parthian coinage would have been received. The evidence, as usual, is fragmentary and has mostly been inferred from Achaemenid and Sassanian culture.

#### Iranian culture

Zoroastrianism played a large role in day-to-day life, and most local Iranian rulers favored Ahura Mazda as their supreme god.<sup>34</sup> Mithra and Anahita also get prominent mentions, although most of the rural population still worshipped nature gods and kept up fertility cults. Texts recovered from Susa, as well as excavations in Old Nisa point towards a certain reverence for the king's *daimon*.<sup>35</sup> This was not something that was generally accepted within Zoroastrianism, and as such has been difficult for historians to pinpoint. However, because of clear archaeological markers we are led to believe that the Iranian population was able to combine the two. There are some other indications that the coming of the Parthians changed local religions, namely worshiping of dynastic ancestors—perhaps influenced by Greek practices.<sup>36</sup>

#### Semitic culture

When the Parthians moved into the Mesopotamian region, they would have encountered a completely different set of cultural values. The population of Mesopotamia had similar animist beliefs as that of Iran, but they also focused on local spirits and deities (called *baal* or *baalat*), as well as astral elements.<sup>37</sup> More than that, familiar names from old Babylon still surface in Seleucid and much of Parthian Mesopotamia. There are sanctuaries to, amongst others, Marduk, Anu and Ishtar.<sup>38</sup> Although there were many developments in this area

<sup>34</sup> M.A.R. Colledge, *The Parthian period* (Leiden 1986) 4.

<sup>35</sup> Colledge, *The Parthian Period*, 4 and E. Dabrowa, ‘ΑΡΣΑΚΕΣ ΘΕΟΣ: Observations on the nature of the Parthian ruler-cult’ in: *Un impaziente desiderio di scorrere il mondo. Studi in onore di Antonio Invernizzi per il suo settantesimo compleanno* (Florence 2022) 247-254.

<sup>36</sup> Colledge, *The Parthian period*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

throughout the Seleucid and Parthian reign, Iranian religion only influenced the area minimally.<sup>39</sup>

### Greek culture

Although it is always easy to think that we know Greek religion and culture, we must tread carefully considering the circumstances. Invading peoples, far away in time and space from the original Greek homeland and conflicting cultures all around will certainly have influenced ‘Greek culture’ as we know it. When they went east, certain Greek deities gained prominence. Most noticeably, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Helios and Apollo, Heracles and Tyche featured prominently in Eastern Hellenistic iconography.<sup>40</sup> These gods were sometimes subject to syncretism, in which Greek gods were adapted to local religion. The local population would find equivalences in the Greek gods and worship them like this, sometimes with a Greek name in the local language, sometimes more subtly changed.<sup>41</sup> Examples are Nabu as Apollo, Bel as Zeus and Gad as Tyche. We also see evidence of this on Parthian coinage. Another very specifically Hellenistic development was the ruler cult, instigated by Alexander the Great and happily followed up upon by his successors. Through the influence of both the Greek and the Semitic population, we see that ancestor cults gained popularity in Parthian times.

As shown in this section, it is clear that ‘Parthian art’ as such did not exist. As such, what we see on coinage is not something that is ‘Parthian’ per se, it is the art that emanated from the centralized ruling elite. What we will see in the following chapters is their interpretation of art, culture and history, and their interpretation of what this would mean to the population that would handle these coins.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 8.

# **Chapter 2**

## **What is culture? An anthropological analysis**

We now know a little more about Parthian history and the different peoples that inhabited Mithradates' empire. Before we move on to the coinage of Mithradates, his forebears and his successors, we should look at the concept of culture. By trying to understand the problems and nuances with this field of study, the coins will speak to us more clearly.

First, what is 'culture'? How has the conception of culture changed over the years, and how is it seen nowadays?

### **Culture as a concept**

One of the biggest points of dispute throughout the history of the anthropological field has been the concept of 'culture'. From its inception, scholars have been trying to explain what it is and how it works. In the nineteenth century scholars saw culture as a scale of development, with some countries being superior in cultural development and sophistication, and others inferior. There was a finishing point of perfect sophistication, which had of course been reached in the scholar's own country, be it Prussia, England or elsewhere. This was discredited when scholars started viewing cultures on their own, without comparing them to others. Culture was mostly seen as something abstract, as something that could be studied without considering the people who were part of the culture.<sup>42</sup> Anthropologists started researching culture systems such as language, symbols, cognitive systems and otherwise.<sup>43</sup> In doing so, the idea that cultures could be compared by finding some essential parts of it (connected to the practitioners of the culture or not) started fading away. Finally, this work lead to two different interpretations of culture: Generic culture, in which all humans are engaged in some interpretation of culture in which they organize and direct their lives; and differential culture, in which humanity is divided into smaller groups that live and behave in specific ways.<sup>44</sup> While this is often reduced to essentialism (that is to say, a person must have certain characteristics because they belong to a certain culture), it is the more useful interpretation of 'culture' for anthropologists who wish to continue studying people.

However, what seems the most relevant to our situation is the perception of culture that has come into being since the early 1990's: the idea of culture as a construct. This makes culture an open-ended concept, something that is not absolute and which is certainly not the same for all of the people attributed to the culture. The re-thinking of culture was introduced by Barth in 1989.<sup>45</sup> He said that, amongst other things, the meaning of a culture is attributed and not simply there, unquestioned; that culture is not equally distributed; that culture means different things for different people, and it is not shared with everyone; and that cultural meaning depends on one's social position. What this means, in practice, is that an event will be interpreted differently even by people who seemingly belong to the same group, and that

<sup>42</sup> For example, F. Boas, *Race, language and culture* (New York 1966). For more examples, see. J. Friedman, 'Notes on culture and identity in imperial worlds', in: P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad, J. Zahle (eds.), *Religion and religious practice in the Seleucid kingdom* (Aarhus 1990), 14-39, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Friedman, 'Notes on culture and identity', 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>45</sup> F. Barth, 'The study of culture in complex societies' *Ethnos* 3-4 (1989) 12-42.

changes in culture can happen without being noticed by those affected by it. Some may have had a hand in change; others may not have noticed it at all.

Similarly, if a ‘foreign’ culture is perceived by someone from another culture, they will inevitably interpret it with that background in mind. For example, research has shown that furniture crafted in an English style by Brazilians in the early nineteenth century was similar to the original, but had been influenced by the knowledge and the experiences of the Brazilian craftspeople.<sup>46</sup> European images made by Mexican artists were also inevitably influenced by their own vision on the art they were creating.<sup>47</sup> And when Christianity spread throughout the world, the Virgin Mary was easily assimilated with local female goddesses.<sup>48</sup>

So, what is culture? It is an open-ended set of values and ideas, which become real when acted upon by individuals. It means something different to everyone, and it is subject to different kinds of change. A change can happen with a new ruler, but it can also happen with an expansion and centralization of an empire. The elite may have influence on it, but it also may not, especially in the case of decentralization. What this meant for the rule of Mithradates will be shown later.

### Culture in the Hellenistic East: What was ‘Greekness’?

When examining evidence, it is often tempting to see particular practices as stemming from a certain culture, which can be pointed out and analyzed. This allows the archaeologist, the historian and the classicist to determine not only what happened in a particular place, but also take guesses about how the culture that the evidence supposedly came from had spread. However, as we have seen above, what this strongly depends on is a view of cultures as separate—not in the sense that cultural groups did not interact, but in the way that an object or act can be seen as purely belonging to one culture. By filtering out the other elements one would be able to discern what is Greek, and what is Other. This is problematic, because it not only reduces the agency of ancient actors but it takes away so much of what is interesting about interaction in antiquity. Diversity, change and adaptation are left to the side in order to perhaps create a clear, but not completely true image of a period or place.

We then need to approach our ancient evidence from a different standpoint. As discussed above, anthropological research has been applying this broader interpretation of culture for the past few decades; ancient studies have only recently caught up. While confusing at times (after all, using these perceptions of culture make the chance of giving a clear answer about *wie es eigentlich gewesen* even slimmer than before) it has provided us with many new insights.

In this particular case, it is of interest to examine the concept of ‘Greek culture’. The reason that the time after the conquests of Alexander the Great is called ‘Hellenism’ is because of the perceived spread of Greeks and Greek culture. Greeks settled in places from Egypt to India, and they supposedly influenced local culture to such an extent that their culture became the dominant one. It is always admitted that Greek culture in far lands was also influenced by the local culture, but Greek culture would have been dominant because of the social status that those of Greek descent enjoyed. They were richer and had more political

<sup>46</sup> P. Burke, *Cultural hybridity* (Cambridge 2009) 15.

<sup>47</sup> Burke, *Cultural hybridity*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 17.

influence, and as such their language, alphabet and cultural aspects such as the gymnasium won out. This view has recently been discredited. The reason this is no longer the predominant outlook on Hellenism is a different view on culture itself. In this next part we will look at the way ‘Greekness’ is seen in modern Hellenistic scholarship. Can we say anything about it as a coherent whole? Or is it too confusing a category to use?

An interesting example of cultural exchange and fusion is seen in the way ancestry was used in Eastern cities. What we see from the second half of the third century on is that communities start using a sense of shared ancestry (an ancestry that is, of course, Greek) to bind themselves together. This is called *syngeneia*, meaning ‘kinship’. The concept has been deeply examined by John Ma, when he tied this into the archaeological theory of ‘peer polity interaction’.<sup>49</sup> The process of peer polity interaction when combined with the concept of *syngeneia* meant, in practice, that cities would communicate with one another about their shared heritage. This could mean that they had the same heroic founder, that both cities had roots in the same area, or otherwise. In communicating with one another, cities and the elite that lived in these cities emphasized the fact that they were on the same level, and in doing so they created a more cohesive community.<sup>50</sup> The evidence for this comes from inscriptions and literary sources, and scholars have been attempting to explain it for a long time. Why would a community use such artificial measures to bind itself together?

Previously, scholars have tried to explain it in a way that can easily be described as etic. While not inherently bad, this gives the majority of the people no agency, and makes a small minority (who supposedly engineered the fabrication of identity) look manipulative and all-powerful.<sup>51</sup> These works strongly emphasize a conscious invention of tradition. However, the evidence at hand would not have come into being without a real belief in their shared identity. This process seems to have started with Alexander the Great, who had to resort to several methods to bind him to the newly conquered territory. One of the ways in which he did this was actual kinship ties, through marriage; another was the use of mythology as a parallel to his own experiences. By referring to Herakles and Dionysus (both Greek mythological figures who had travelled the world, and especially the Eastern parts of it, and came back conquerors) Alexander was able to normalize his Greek presence in the Asian world.<sup>52</sup> What did this mean for the Greeks who moved to, or already lived in, Asian regions at this time? Stavrianopoulou posits that the tradition of a shared kinship caused the Greeks to not only feel at home, but to make them feel part of a group of ‘relatives’.<sup>53</sup> This probably occurred at the level directly below that of the absolute rulers. It was easy for this to happen through creative peer polity interaction, such as when pacts needed to be made or festivals were held: one city needed the other, and through a common patron deity or shared origin story, they found a way to feel close to one another.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> J. Ma, ‘Peer polity interaction in the Hellenistic Age’, *Past and Present* 180 (2003) 9-39.

<sup>50</sup> E. Stavrianopoulou, ‘Hellenistic world(s) and the concept of ‘Greekness’’ in: E. Stavrianopoulou, *Shifting social imaginaries in the Hellenistic period* (Leiden 2013) 177-206, 181.

<sup>51</sup> For example, see L.E. Patterson, *Kinship myth in ancient Greece* (Austin 2010), or A. Erskine, “O brother where art thou? Tales of kinship and diplomacy”. In: D. Ogden, *the Hellenistic world: new perspectives* (London 2002) 97-115.

<sup>52</sup> Stavrianopoulou, ‘The concept of Greekness’, 182.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 196.

When we combine the theory of peer polity interaction with the fact that there were, in fact, strong callbacks to Greek culture in the Hellenistic East, we can form a tentative idea about the way Greekness functioned in a non-Greek setting. A Greek in Egypt would have had a very different day-to-day life than a Greek in Syria, but they would have had certain clear-cut ideas about their heritage, and what made their version of the culture so Greek. Language, theater, philosophy, literature, as well as certain social rules are all included in this. The construction of culture, and the influence of one set of cultural aspects on another, is most likely not a conscious effort. But the onset of empire could have crystallized it. This has been proven by anthropological studies of hegemonies. In these studies, they found that in case of increasing hegemony, there is also an increase in cultural centralization.<sup>55</sup> This happened through the influence of the elite on the lower classes. In case of a decrease in hegemony, we would see the opposite happen: people would fall back on more traditional and local values and ways of expression.

It is also a viable theory that there was a certain set of cultural elements that was classified as ‘Greek’. Like mentioned before, we need to think of language, literature and behavioral rules, which set one group of people apart from others. Like the invention of kinship, which utilizes mythological backgrounds as foundation theories, the adoption of this set of rules would have included one into the ‘Greek’ system. Speaking the language, knowing the literature and artistic history and behaving in a way that was supposedly ‘Greek’ (whatever that may have entailed) could have been enough to be included.

While many of its inhabitants may actually have Greek heritage, it seems likely that, by the middle of the second century BCE, there were few people living in cities such as Seleucia who had lived in Greece for a prolonged period of time, or who had even visited it. The kinship and identity that had formed by this time may have contained elements that had their origin in Greece. However, they had been so adapted and changed by the needs of their new environment that it seems precocious to say anything about how Greek this actually was, and how Greek the inhabitants of the cities felt. In fact, it is important to emphasize that appropriation and acculturation was a process that was continuously happening in the background. This is one of the reasons that recent scholarship has rightly pulled away the focus from the spread of Greek culture to the study of other aspects of the Near East (and other regions) after Alexander the Great.

In this chapter we have looked at the concept of ‘culture’. We learned about the anthropological background of the term, and we read theories on what defines a culture. We have come to the conclusion that culture is an amalgam, a constantly changing interpretation of language, practices and history. Cultural aspects are also interpreted differently by different people, depending on their experiences and background. We have also put this in the perspective of the Near East in Hellenistic times, finding that ‘Greekness’ may have been experienced by people, but that it was experienced in many different ways. However, what was originally Greek may have come to mean something else: a symbol of kinship between cities, a sign that one belonged to the elite or a callback to another place and time. Greek and non-Greek (indigenous or no) elements could and did interact without there being a clear line to divide the two.

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<sup>55</sup> Friedman, ‘Notes on culture and identity’, 36; see also figure 3 on p. 36 of that work for an illustration.

# Chapter 3

## Coins and kings: the numismatic analysis

### **Part 1: Coinage before Mithradates I**

In order to properly put the changes that occurred during the reign of Mithradates in perspective, we will first take a short look at the coinage of the kings that came before him. First, we will look at the state of minting coins in the Seleucid Empire and other parts of the East; after that, we will summarize the state of Parthian coinage before Mithradates. After that we will move on to the examination of the numismatic material of Mithradates himself.

#### **Eastern and Seleucid coinage**

During Persian time, coin minting in the East was restricted to coastal areas, where trade routes would have made coinage necessary.<sup>56</sup> These coins featured local motifs, such as patron deities and city signs. The central government mostly issued coins for military purposes.<sup>57</sup> Coin minting was seen as a sign of autonomy for local cities, as they were allowed to mint their own coin types in any way they wanted. This state of affairs continued for a while, until the reign of Darius I. During this time, centralized coin that was issued from the government itself became more wide-spread. Although the Persian Empire minted silver coins as well, the gold coins were most well-spread and well-known. These coins were known as Darics, and were made largely of gold.<sup>58</sup> The image, a kneeling archer (believed to be the emperor himself), was the same on all of these coins (see plate 2).

This all changed after Alexander the Great. He founded many new mints, causing there to be a great many mints under Seleucid rule. Alexander's introduction of the tetradrachm, as well as the enforcement of the Greek monetary standard, took away much of the mint houses' former autonomy, however.<sup>59</sup> When it comes to iconography, Alexander the Great favored Herakles and an enthroned Zeus, holding an eagle.<sup>60</sup>

Although the first Seleucid, Seleucus I (r. 311-281 BCE) only added to these types, his son, Antiochus I (r. 281-261 BCE) reduced them. Seleucid tetradrachms from then on until the time we encounter Mithradates I were fairly simple: on the obverse, a portrait of the (clean-shaven) king, on the reverse Apollo, seated on an *omphalos* or leaning on a tripod (see plate 3). The importance of Apollo was dynastic, and as such these coins became symbolic for the reign of the Seleucids. Only in exceptional cases (and in small mint houses) was the local population allowed to mint small bronze coins with local motifs.<sup>61</sup> All other coins were subject to the standard of the Seleucid ruler. Other exceptions are seen in large cities during times of either increased autonomy or opposition to the Seleucid overlords, like Hierapolis,

<sup>56</sup> J. Zahle, 'Religious motifs on Seleucid coins', in: P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad, J. Zahle (eds.) *Religion and religious practice in the Seleucid kingdom* (Aarhus 1990) 125-139, 125.

<sup>57</sup> Zahle, 'Religious motifs', 125.

<sup>58</sup> In fact, the percentage of gold (which lay at around 95%) is an indication that they were not minted for daily use. The value would have been too high to do regular business with. See: C. Anthon, *A Classical Dictionary* (New York 1841).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>60</sup> As has often been noted by scholars, these types did not only refer to Alexander's alleged heritage, but they could also refer to more local deities, like Melqart or Ba'al.

<sup>61</sup> Zahle, 'Religious motifs', 127.

Babylonia and Persis.<sup>62</sup> In these cases, they minted coins with traditional gods and a local language on the legend. However, in all cases, subordination or not, they retained the Attic weight standard, which gave their coins international appeal. Because of the rigid control over the mint houses, it is clear that coinage in the Seleucid Empire was vital to autonomy. A non-autonomous city or region was not able to mint any coinage of their own; and cities that tried to get out from underneath the empire's rule needed to mint their own coinage. Through this and other media the Seleucids attempted to create a shared identity.<sup>63</sup>

Before moving on it is of interest to briefly discuss the coinage of Antiochus IV (r. 175-164 BCE), which was contemporary with the reign of Mithradates. Antiochus made some innovations to the coinage, most noticeable being the introduction of a new reverse: instead of Apollo on the *omphalos*, we now find an enthroned Zeus Nikephoros. Reasons for this change are unsure, although it is very likely that part of the motivation was the need for a deity that spoke to the indigenous population. Later, when other motifs start showing up, the syncretism becomes clear through attributes associated with the indigenous gods appearing next to a god who appears to be Zeus.<sup>64</sup>

### Parthian coinage

Before Arsakes I, we have no record of local Parthian coinage, presumably because the necessary coinage was provided by the Seleucids. The first kings minted drachms and lower denominations only, as tetradrachms started being struck when Mithradates I conquered Seleucia on the Tigris. The location of these early mints is often uncertain, sometimes presumed as Nisa but never truly sure.<sup>65</sup>

What do we see on these coins? On the very first type (Sellwood type 1, hereafter S1) we see on the obverse the head of a man facing right.<sup>66</sup> He has large features, with a strong nose and chin and big eyes, wearing a soft cap and a diadem. There are hints of hair and small decorations around the rims of the cap. On the reverse, we see a sitting man, facing left, holding a bow. The man sits on a stool and wears the same felt cap as well as something resembling a cape. The legends will be elaborated upon later, but we can clearly see that this first type says ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ.

In iconography, S2 through S4 are mostly the same. From S2 on, the man on the front (presumably Arsakes himself) faces left instead of right. On S3 and S4, the ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ disappears from the legend and is replaced by an Aramaic word, transliterated as *krny*.<sup>67</sup> S4 has the archer facing right instead of left.

Arsakes' son, Arsakes II, maintained his father's iconography where possible. As

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>63</sup> Zahle, 'Religious motifs', 133.

<sup>64</sup> Zahle mentions that this is one of the signs that the Seleucids failed in their program of unity; by not focusing enough energy on the indigenous, or 'Oriental' people, they alienated that part of the empire. As soon as their grasp on the empire started to weaken, local cities started minting local deities. Antiochus' changes made the coinage more familiar and accessible to local people, but that did mean a failure of the previous ideas of an empire-wide ideology.

<sup>65</sup> Sellwood, *Coinage of Parthia*, pages 1 through 23.

<sup>66</sup> A note on Sellwood: The best and biggest source for Parthian numismatics is David Sellwood's *An introduction to the coinage of Parthia*. Coin types are collected and put in order in this book, accompanied by detailed drawings. Scholars of Parthian numismatics frequently refer to Sellwood's types. However, it should be noted that the only print available to me was the one published in 1971. The second print, from 1980, was not available. I have tried as well as I could to add any reviews Sellwood might have made since the 1971 print.

<sup>67</sup> Sellwood, *The coinage of Parthia*, 16.

mentioned earlier in this history, however, he was thwarted in his military campaigns by Antiochus III of the Seleucids.<sup>68</sup> It is presumed by scholars of Parthian numismatics that after a while, Arsakes II ceased minting his own autonomous coinage and the Parthian people went back to using Seleucid coinage. Those coins that he did mint have no change from the former mints. The obverse king wears the cap, diadem and faces left; the reverse archer sits on a stool, holding a bow, racing right. The legend now simply says ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ.

The next kings, Phriapitius and Phraates I, did not to our knowledge mint any coinage as they functioned as satraps for the Seleucids.<sup>69</sup> This meant that from roughly 209 BCE, when Antiochus III had his successes, through to the start of the reign of Mithradates I in 171, there was no autonomous Parthian coinage. The early coinage of Mithradates closely followed the example of the early Arsacid kings until around 141. In the following chapters we will look both at the small changes in this early coinage as well as the larger changes that happen from ca. 141 BCE on.

### **Titles on pre-Mithradatic coinage**

#### ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ

In the expanse of coins we are looking at, this title is only used by Arsakes I. It is used only on S1 and S2, in combination with the name ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ. Of course, since the latter is his actual name, on this type αυτοκρατορος is the only title visible on this coin. In its earliest form the title probably meant something like, “Elected general” in Seleucid protocol.<sup>70</sup> It should be understood, then, that this was what the Parthians were under early Seleucid rule. They fulfilled the role of a satrap, a king that swore allegiance to the Seleucid throne. Other indications on the coinage of Arsakes I confirm that this was also the role they played in public: we see the Aramaic word *krny* replace part of the Greek legend. We see this in S3. The word, in Achaemenian usage, meant something close to στρατηγος—a word related to the autocrat of later coins.<sup>71</sup> That the Arsacids remained in this role for a while can also be inferred from the absence of coinage under Phriapitius and Phraates I.

#### ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ

This became a title after the king’s proper name was no longer ‘Arsakes’. For the Arsacid dynasty, this name became something of an honorific, as well as an indicator of heritage. It is important to note that this title is present on almost all of the coinage until the end of the Arsacid dynasty. It serves the function of confirming continuity with one’s forebears as well as putting oneself firmly within a tradition.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>70</sup> D. Sellwood, ‘Parthian coins’, in: E. Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 3: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods, Part 1* (Cambridge 1983), 277-298, 279.

<sup>71</sup> Sellwood, ‘Parthian coins’, 280.

## **Part 2: Coinage under Mithradates I**

In this part of the paper, we will look closely at the coins that Mithradates had minted. Instead of describing them type-by-type, we will examine themes found within the coins. First, we will look at the change from *bashlyk* to diadem; then, at the titles and epitheta used. After that, we will try to find out why the king went from clean-shave to bearded. Next, we will look at the Parthians' most typical reverse image: the royal archer. A smaller aspect of that will be examined in the next part where we will look at the *omphalos* used on Mithradates' coinage from day one. Then, there was the last issue made under Mithradates, which brought some big changes. In the final part of this chapter we will look at those changes and what they might signify.

### **The Diadem**

As with most rulers, the Arsacid kings identified themselves on their royal portraits with a very particular headdress: the diadem. It is one of those symbols of kingship that instantly identify the wearer as the king, and as such it holds great importance. Because it is such a recognizable item, it is especially well portrayed on numismatic material. In this chapter we will look at what the portraits on the obverse (and, occasionally, the reverse) wore, where that came from, and what it signifies.

In its origin, the Greek noun *diadema* had from its beginning the association with 'royal headband'.<sup>72</sup> It came from the verb *diadeo*, meaning 'to bind round'. Although it went through a progression of sorts, what we refer to here is a band, made of cloth of a certain color (white, most often), worn by a ruler. It is worn around the head, with a knot in the back, with ends left hanging.

There are many theories about the origin of the diadem. Some believe that it had a Macedonian origin, some that it was worn by winners of the Olympic Games, and others that it had a Persian origin.<sup>73</sup> Most scholars do agree, however, that Alexander the Great popularized it, and that it was adopted by the Diadochs after his death. The problem lies in conflicting primary sources: there are written sources saying Alexander copied the idea of the diadem from the Persian king, others mention no such thing and assume that it is simply an exclusive symbol of Alexander's leadership.<sup>74</sup> However, most scholars now agree that the diadem in Persia was a symbol of high standing, not of kingship; those in the inner circle of the king could all wear it. In fact, they could also wear tiaras: the king set himself apart by wearing an upright tiara.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, there are no archaeological signs that confirm the fact that the Persian king wore a diadem.

The theory that it was worn by winners of the Olympic Games (thus giving it a Greek origin, and not a Persian one) is not a popular one.<sup>76</sup> For one, royal spouses are often depicted

<sup>72</sup> R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits* (oxford 1988) 34.

<sup>73</sup> On the Macedonian origin: A.B. Bosworth, 'Alexander and the Iranians', Journal of Hellenistic Studies 100 (1980), 1-21. This theory is not often believed by historians.

<sup>74</sup> Written sources: Diod. Sic. 17, which mentions both a Persian origin as well as a non-Persian origin; Curt. Ruf. 6.6.4, and Curt. Ruf. 10.6.5 which also does not mention a Persian origin. These conflicting statements happen with other sources as well.

<sup>75</sup> H.W. Ritter, *Diadem und königsherrschaft: untersuchungen zu Zeremonien und Rechtsgrundlagen des Herrschaftsantritts bei den Persern, bei Alexander dem Grossen und im Hellenismus* (München 1965) 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> H.W. Ritter., 'Die bedeutung des Diadems' *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 36 (1987) 290-301, 291.

wearing the diadem, when they clearly had nothing to do with military victories.<sup>77</sup> Most scholars believe that the diadem had an Eastern origin, although when and where that tradition started is unsure. Xenophon mentions a diadem worn around a tiara by certain Eastern kings, but we now believe that he was referring to a costume worn by Median royalty.<sup>78</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint the origin precisely *because* it became such a well-known symbol in Hellenistic times: authors could have had the feeling that it must have been around for far longer than it actually has been. But if the only reason Alexander wore the headband was because it was also worn by Persian kings, the diadem would not have meant anything positive to the Western subjects; if it was the other way around (a Greek or Macedonian origin), it would not have communicated anything of worth to the Eastern subjects. When we look at concrete signs and evidence of the use of the headband, however, we see that it was actually quite flexible. In different incarnations, we see that it was used by pre-Achaemenid dynasties, by Neo-Assyrian kings, by pharaohs and even on depictions of Greek gods.<sup>79</sup>

As has become clear, the origin of the diadem is not straightforward. Alexander the Great instilled the diadem with meaning, and its original meaning was that it signified him as the ‘king of Asia’.<sup>80</sup> We should stress here that that does not mean that he meant to portray himself as the heir of the Persian Empire: to the contrary, he had made a new land for himself, that spanned the former Persian Empire but which was completely new under his rule.<sup>81</sup>

What we could posit is that it may have been something of a mix of symbols, something that Alexander the Great would have needed for his mixed empire. Alexander’s Eastern subjects as well as his Greek subjects would have been familiar with the diadem as a symbol of leadership or high standing, but both in completely different ways. Greeks could have seen it as worn by gods or important mortals<sup>82</sup>; inhabitants of the Asian part of the empire would have known it from the Achaemenids, or from other iconographic material. Alexander instilled it with new meaning, and because of him it became one of the most important symbols of kingship in the Hellenistic East. One of the groups of heirs to Alexander’s throne, the Seleucids, used the symbol faithfully on their royal propaganda. The diadem is also featured on much of their numismatic material. The tradition of the diadem in the East was substantiated by the Seleucids. There, it was purely worn by royalty and their relatives.<sup>83</sup> Whether it was an individual sign or a dynastic one is, however, unsure.<sup>84</sup> The Seleucids’ use of the diadem, as well as its ensuing popularity as a symbol of leadership in Eastern region, caused it to also be used by non-Greek rulers in Bithynia, Cappadocia and Pontus.<sup>85</sup> In this way, we see that the diadem became a potent symbol throughout the land

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<sup>77</sup> Ritter, ‘Bedeutung des Diadems’, 294; for a deeper disproof of this theory, see the entire paper.

<sup>78</sup> Xen. *Cyropaed.* 8.3.13.; Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits*, 36.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> It is of interest that later writers state that the diadem could have its origin in the god Dionysos. When he conquered land in the East, he ‘discovered’ the diadem. Kings supposedly copied him in this. See: *Diod. Sic.* 4.4.4.; Pliny, *NH* 7.191. This is interesting insofar as it could have some historical value, with the association of the diadem being a symbol of a conquered Asian empire.

<sup>83</sup> Ritter, ‘Bedeutung des diadems’, 291

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits*, 38.

Alexander the Great had conquered. It is with this information that we can start looking at the importance of the diadem for the Arsacids.

### Mithradates I and the diadem

The first of the Arsacids, Arsakes I, portrayed himself on his coins wearing two different types of headdresses combined. On plate 4 we see him wearing a satrapal headdress, now often referred to as a *bashlyk*. This was a hat probably made from a felt-type fabric (because of the way the fabric folds forward or sideways) and was already used in Achaemenid and Seleucid times. During the reign of these dynasties, the *bashlyk* was worn by satraps.<sup>86</sup> So too by the Parthian kings, before their independence. Some of the earliest Parthian coinage shows the king wearing the *bashlyk*, where it is combined with a tiara. The archer on the reverse also wears this costume, complete with what seems to be traditional Parthian dress. The floppy hood disappears from later Parthian regal portraits, but remains visible on the majority of the reverses.

However, where the *bashlyk* disappears, the diadem remains. From Mithradates I until Mithradates II (r. 123-88 BCE), this was the standard way Parthian kings portrayed themselves. It is also of note that the dress the king wears on his coins is not something that seems particularly Parthian, but it looks more as if he is wearing a *chiton*—a typically Greek type of dress.<sup>87</sup>

What does this say about Mithradates and the kings who were his immediate successors? Traditionally, the Arsacids are seen as ‘successors’ to the Achaemenid Empire. The ancient authors saw the extent of their territory as well as the threat they posed to the Roman empire at times as a reason to connect the Parthians with the Achaemenids. Can actual iconography link them to this older dynasty as well? And could Achaemenid symbolism tell us anything about Parthian symbolism?

Because of the scarcity of Arsacid visual propaganda, it is difficult to say. As well as that, most of the Achaemenid headdresses that we know of look more like the tiaras used by later Parthian kings. In order to compare at all, we should look at what was worn by Arsacids slightly later on. Mithradates II was the first king to portray himself wearing the tiara, as seen on plate 5, and it later caught on with his successors.<sup>88</sup> This is part of a more traditionally Iranian program, which could have been a reference to the Persians. However, no known form of the official Achaemenid crown resembles this tiara.<sup>89</sup> If anything, scholars say, the Arsacid tiara looks more like what the rulers of Armenia and Cappadocia wore than that of the Persians. It could even have been an adaptation of Median headdresses that we know resemble the Arsacid tiara.<sup>90</sup> As such, even if the tiara does look like it was inspired by the

<sup>86</sup> V. Sarkhosh Curtis, ‘The Parthian costume and headdress’ in: J. Wiesehöfer, *Das partherreich und seine Zeugnisse* (Stuttgart 1998) 61-73.

<sup>87</sup> Curtis, ‘The Parthian costume and headdress’, 62. Before Mithradates, the kings wore a sort of ‘trouser-suit’, as seen on some larger statues from the region. This suit is once again worn by Artabanos I (r. c. 127-123 BCE), on all of his coins. This seems to hark back to the tribal origins of the Parthians. For more information, see V.S. Curtis, 63-67.

<sup>88</sup> Although this was only on certain drachms in the highlands of Iran and the east; his tetradrachms from Seleucia still depict the king wearing a diadem.

<sup>89</sup> M. J. Olbrycht, ‘Parthian king’s tiara: Numismatic evidence and some aspects of Arsacid political ideology’ *Notae Numismatae* (1997) 27-61, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Olbrycht, ‘Parthian king’s tiara’, 40.

Achaemenids, it is more likely that it was inspired by the Medians—who in turn may have been inspired by the Achaemenids.

As we have seen before, and will see also in later chapters, Mithradates I was influenced by the Seleucids. This is not strange, considering that this is who he was up against during his campaigns and that the Parthians had been Seleucid satraps for over a century. But we do notice that other parts of the visual language start to conform to a more Seleucid type—for example, the fact that Mithradates from S12 on starts showing himself facing right instead of left.<sup>91</sup> While not conclusive evidence that Mithradates copied the Seleucids without knowing what the implications of their symbolic language were, it does give us a sign that he was willing to look at what would have been familiar to the people now under his rule.

Looking at the evidence above, it seems likely that neither explanation fully covers what we see happening on coinage. Instead of focusing on just *one* piece of heritage, it seems more appropriate to see the Parthian diadem the same way that the Alexandrian diadem is now seen. Using the implications of both Seleucid and Median/Achaemenid iconography, Mithradates I might have been able to use *one* kind of headdress to communicate with different parts of the population.

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<sup>91</sup> It should be noted that the way the obverse portraits faces is changed by Artabano I.

# **Titles and Epitheta**

Titles are some of the most obvious, but most overlooked evidence on coinage. We tend to focus on the iconography, because it is often so interesting and difficult to interpret. However, titles are just as much part of the whole message as any other part of the coin is.

In the case of Mithradates I, this is especially true. There are several elements on his coinage that are innovative, from use of titles to the titles themselves. In this chapter, I will look at the titles used on Mithradates' coinage.

## ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ

This title, meaning ‘great king’, is present on many of Mithradates’ coins. In this, we are including the use of ΜΕΓΑΣ instead of ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ.<sup>92</sup> Before the satrapal headdress is abandoned and replaced with the diadem, the royal title already changes from Arsakes the King to Arsakes the Great King (from ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ on type 9 to ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ on types 10 through 13, see plates 6 and 7). This reflects a crucial change between the previous use of αυτοκρατορος, which was essentially a title to denote the king’s states of a subject of the Seleucid king. However, when Mithradates conquers much of the Seleucid land he no longer sees himself, nor presents himself as a vassal king.<sup>93</sup> As such, he becomes the ‘Great King’.

## ΒΑΣΙΛΕΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ

Meaning ‘king of kings’. This title has a strong Persian association, as we see it being used on several famous Persian documents.<sup>94</sup> When it comes to the use of this title on Mithradates’ coinage, we cannot delve too deep, as this title really came into use from Mithradates II on.<sup>95</sup> However, in the interest of looking at all angles, it should be noted that there are theories that state that there is epigraphic material of Mithradates using the title.<sup>96</sup>

Because the use of the title is not consistent, and not visible on any of Mithradates I’s coinage, we cannot draw conclusions as to the importance of the use of this title. However, it is important to realize that this is not simply a reference to the Persians. Mithradates II’s usage of the title is in line with other Hellenistic kings’, and it seems to be more a title that served as an alternative to Seleucid and/or Alexandrian titles. The Seleucids, after all, had never made

<sup>92</sup> This different incarnation of the title is visible on S10:1-14, S10:16-19, S11:1-7, S12:1-8, S12:11-13, S12:16-18, S12:21-25 and S13:6-10.

<sup>93</sup> Sellwood, ‘Parthian coins’, 281.

<sup>94</sup> For example, in the letter of Darius (R. Meiggs, L.D. Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (1988) no. 12), or on the Behistun inscription.

<sup>95</sup> For an explanation of this, see R. Fowler, ‘Most fortunate roots: Tradition and legitimacy in Parthian royal ideology’ in: R. Fowler, O. Hekster, (eds.), *Imaginary kings: Royal images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome* (München 2005), 125-15. Mithradates II only starts using this title from S27 on, which is considerably far into his reign.

<sup>96</sup> A.J. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia vol. III: Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.* (Vienna 1996) no. 140C, upper edge 1; G.F. Del Monte, *Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica, vol. I: Testi Cronografici* (Pisa 1997) 245; An inscription at Hung-I Nauruzi which refers to ‘Mithridates King of Kings’. For discussion and literature, see: Fowler, ‘Most fortunate roots’, 146, note 64, as well as: Wiesehöfer, ‘”Kings of Kings” and ‘Philhellēn:” Kingship in Arsacid Iran’, in: P. Bilde, *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship* (Aarhus 1996) 55-66, 61.

use of this title.<sup>97</sup> In this way, it is in line with Mithradates II adopting the Iranian tiara—creating a distance from the Seleucid and Greek type of kingship.

### ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ

We first see this title used on tetradrachms of Mithradates I (S13, Plate 8). These are coins that are all struck in Seleucia, as mentioned before. What we see on the coins that feature this title is this legend: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ. So, it is simply adding to the previous titles. Drachms from this mint do not feature this particular epithet.

As we will see in a later chapter, this title is one of the clearest signs of communication with the new Greek subjects that Mithradates had to contend with. Revolts and helping the enemy made it increasingly important to broadcast a new message, one of acceptance and inclusion, perhaps even one of elevated importance. Of course, this is not a title without a history. It was already used by Herodotus to describe the Egyptian Amasis, and by Isocrates when he describes the inhabitants of Cyprus under Evagoras.<sup>98</sup> In Hellenistic times, however, it was outright avoided by the Seleucids and the Ptolemies—leading us to the belief that φιλελληνος was vastly different from ελληνος. By using this title, the king identifies himself as a 'friendly outsider'. He does not strive to be a Greek, but he wants to show that he is friendly to them, open to them and is open to dialogue.

### ΘΕΟΣ

We see ΘΕΟΥ show up on S 10.12 (Plate 9). It was struck in Hecatompulos, and it is the first instance of a Parthian king giving himself a divine association. Although it used to be said that this title was first used by Phraates II, in reaction or allusion to the deification of Mithradates I, it is now believed that Mithradates was the one who first used the term.<sup>99</sup> Like Arsakou, this is part of establishing a dynasty, and part of dynastic worship. Although it may seem strange, it is not so unusual to combine both ΘΕΟΣ and ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡ on coins. After all, by claiming divine descent it is only easier to claim divinity for oneself. Mithradates would have been deifying Phriapitius, his father. Neither Phriapitius, nor his other son besides Mithradates, Phraates I, had much time to establish a legacy of their own. They helped consolidate the Parthian state as it was, and had to protect it from the constant threat posed by the Seleucids. The ruler cult was served by the deification of Phriapitius and Phraates I.

<sup>97</sup> Fowler, 'Most fortunate roots', 143

<sup>98</sup> For Amasis, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.178. For Cyprus, see Isoc. *Evag.* 50.

<sup>99</sup> Sellwood, 'Parthian coins', 282; E. Dabrowa, 'Mithradates I and the beginning of the ruler-cult in Parthia' *Electrum* 16 (2009) 42-51, 46.

# The ruler cult in the Parthian empire

Before, we talked about establishing legacy. Through referring to Arsakes I, Mithradates attempted to establish a line of great predecessors. If not for his great ancestors, Mithradates would have been little but a simple conqueror, invading enemy property. But by staking a claim to some sort of a legacy he became more than what he, himself, was.

A ruler cult fits into that picture seamlessly. This subject is often controversial and much-discussed—so too with the Parthians. Although the subject is too large to fully discuss in this paper, it is prudent to explore it partially.

The ruler cult in Parthian history is most clearly supported by archaeological excavations at Nisa. This important political center has been excavated by A. Invernizzi since 1990, before which it had also been excavated by then-Soviet archaeologists. These excavations, which continue to this day, have given us some clue as to how the Parthians used Nisa after their arrival. Scholars now think that Old Nisa (as it is called in excavation reports) was renamed ‘Mithradatkart’ (“Mithradates’ fortress”) by Mithradates I.<sup>100</sup> Architectural evidence points to another change: that from a royal residence into a religious center focused on the ruling dynasty. New buildings built after the arrival of the Arsacids point to a religious revival that lasted centuries.<sup>101</sup> It is even said that Nisa was the burial place of Parthian kings.<sup>102</sup> The sparse finds such as terracotta figurines and some *ostraka* point towards the establishment of a religious-based ideological program that diverted from known Iranian practice.<sup>103</sup> The evidence as it stands today points towards an elitist cult, rather than an empire-wide, compulsory one.<sup>104</sup>

It is tempting to find the inspiration for the ruler cult in the Seleucid empire, but they only introduced the ruler cult under Antiochus III, which seems relatively late to have inspired Mithradates.<sup>105</sup> It is also possible that he found inspiration in the Greco-Bactrian state, which had a ruler cult at the time that Mithradates was fighting there.<sup>106</sup> Seleucid elements could have been introduced after the conquest of their territory, but the origin likely does not lie there.

## When did the ruler cult in Parthia start?

We see the changes in title happen at the same time we see a new portrait type appear on Mithradates’ coinage. When we look at type S11, we see a more realistic type of portrait that seems to be in line with some Seleucid coinage.<sup>107</sup> These coins were struck in Hecatompylos and Nisa, both old Parthian territories. By comparing image types and minting location, we can conclude that the coins which used ‘ΘΕΟΣ’ and ‘ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡ’ preceded the conquest of Media and Elymais.<sup>108</sup> Coins struck afterwards and in the new territories (with mints such as

<sup>100</sup> Dabrowa, ‘Beginning of the ruler cult’, 42. This has some problems, as mints in both Nisa and Mithradatkart have been identified; see gaslain 2009, 36.

<sup>101</sup> Dabrowa, ‘Beginning of the ruler cult’, 43.

<sup>102</sup> Isid. *Stath. Parth.* 12

<sup>103</sup> Dabrowa, ‘Beginning of the ruler cult’, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Dabrowa, ‘ΑΡΣΑΚΕΣ ΘΕΟΣ’, 250.

<sup>105</sup> Dabrowa, ‘Beginning of the ruler cult’, 48.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Susa and Seleucia) have Mithradates facing right instead of left. Portraits facing right were in line with Seleucid tradition, and this is another sign of the Greek audience Mithradates had in mind. However, on the S11 and S10 types, he has not yet conquered these lands and he is still facing left. We can conclude that the start of the ruler cult preceded the king's takeover of these Seleucid territories.

### How can ruler cults be used?

Ruler cults can be incredibly useful for the ruler, if used correctly. They help create a feeling of community. The Parthian empire was conquered so quickly that there must have been some incentive to create community and to build loyalty to the king. One central goal, and one shared activity, is an excellent way to create that. In this case, there was not only the creation of a cult to the ruler himself, but also to the dynasty. We already know that this was important to Mithradates' political program, but it would also have been very important for later rulers. Rivalry often caused members of the Parthian royal family to fall back on dynastic claims. We see this happen when Mithradates II adopts the royal tiara, which referred to his Iranian heritage, but also with Phraates IV, who portrayed himself with a 'royal wart'. This wart would later be used in order to show that the ruler was part of the Parthian dynasty.<sup>109</sup> By establishing a cult centered on the family, not only the ruler himself gets power, but the whole family gains it.

Although dynastic rivalries only intensify later on in Parthian history, the ruler cult (as well as the coinage that supported the ideology thereof) was probably also used as part of a dynastic dispute settlement. Because the Parthian state was legendarily founded by two brothers, Arsakes and Tiridates, it was difficult to honestly say one was a descendant of the true founder. There are conflicting accounts of the succession after Arsakes' death, and who was whose son.<sup>110</sup> By deifying Phriapitius, his father, and *not* Arsakes, Mithradates was ensured of divine descent. Furthermore, the title ' $\Theta\Omega\Pi\Lambda\TOP$ ' was only used by descendants of Priapitius.<sup>111</sup>

As said before, claiming divine descent makes it easier to claim divinity for oneself. As well as that, it creates a legacy and a tradition. After all, if the father of the ruler was a god, and the ruler himself was one, then so must the ruler's son or other chosen successor be gods. This idea did not have its origin in Mithradates I: in fact, it was a normal occurrence amongst Hellenistic states to use a state religion that deified the rulers to unify the country.<sup>112</sup> A dynastic tradition was incredibly useful in these large states, and the population of Iran and Mesopotamia would have been used to a certain extent of involvement in these ruler cults. Neither was it unusual for kin to deify an already-deceased ancestor. There are many similar instances from Hellenistic monarchies, as well as Rome.<sup>113</sup>

As has been shown in these chapters, Mithradates I made massive innovations to the use of the legend on Parthian coinage. Before him, Parthian coins were made up of a single line of

<sup>109</sup> Sellwood, *The coinage of Parthia*, 120.

<sup>110</sup> For example, Just. 41, 5, 5-8 mentions Arsakes → Arsakes II → Phriapitius, father, son and grandson. However, Arr. *FGrH* 156 mentions that Phriapitius was a direct descendant of Tiridates, not Arsakes.

<sup>111</sup> Dabrowa, 'ΑΡΣΑΚΕΣ ΘΕΟΣ', 250.

<sup>112</sup> A good introduction to ruler cults in the Hellenistic age is A. Chaniotis, 'The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers' in: A. Erskine, *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, Wiley (2003).

<sup>113</sup> Dabrowa, 'Beginning of the ruler cult', 46.

titles. The king's predecessors used their name and royal title to clearly demarcate their coins. A royal image and the ubiquitous archer on the reverse did the rest. However, for Mithradates this was not enough. As he worked to unify his empire, as well as create goodwill amongst his subjects, it was necessary to send a different message. The most important innovation, and one that would carry through for centuries, was simply creating compound legends. The examples named had a specific purpose. This is emphasized by the fact that some of them did not have a very long life on Mithradates' coinage: they were meant to convey a message, and an image. When titles are combined with images, both on the obverse and the reverse, they send a clear, strong message. This was also visible with the brief but important use of the word 'ΘΕΟΥ', which was combined with an image as well as a day-to-day practice. The coin confirmed what the people in the region that used this drachm were experiencing, thus reaffirming the importance of the king as their leader and their connection to the divine world. As we will see later, the specific titles Mithradates used were in line with the other changes to his image.

## The king's beard

When considering antiquity, we like to think of the beard as 'Greek'. When we see it worn by an adult man, it evokes memories of philosophers and grand statues of gods. However, when we look at royal iconography in the Hellenistic East, we would soon come to a conclusion that kings were no great fans of beards on their portraiture. What can we make of the change on the later coinage of Mithradates I? We have seen before that the king started portraying himself with a beard from S11 on. He went from clean-shaven to having a beard that seems to reach almost to his chest. Are there any precedents of beards on the portraits of contemporary kings?

The change from shaven to bearded is already a big change on a superficial level. To change his image from the same one that his forefathers had had to one that was more personal and realistic must have been an important decision at the court. This is a trend that we see on the coinage of many Hellenistic kings, in fact, and many have theorized what it means.<sup>114</sup> What is clear is that it was a break from previous Eastern coin portraits, which had been idealized and identical across generations. However, we do not see portraits that are as realistic as Roman portraits were. This cannot be chalked up to a lack of finesse or artistry: the drachms and tetradrachms struck by Mithradates and his successors were fine enough to render the muscles on Herakles' stomach. It is clear that a certain amount of idealization still existed in Hellenistic portraiture, albeit an idealization that spoke to the newfound ideas about what a king should be. Many portraits of Hellenistic kings emphasize strength, and Mithradates' portraits also show a man who looks as if he could lead an army into war.<sup>115</sup>

Supposedly, the change from bearded to clean-shaven on Hellenistic portraits started with Alexander the Great. After Alexander, it became fashionable (with a few exceptions) to imitate that portrait.<sup>116</sup> Even the Romans carried on this tradition: for them, the shaving of the beard became ritualistic, like we see with the placement of the first shavings of Emperor Nero in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.<sup>117</sup> There have been numerous attempts to explain beards when they *are* present on Hellenistic portraits, like a sign of mourning, channeling the Greek philosophers, or personal misfortune such as captivity.<sup>118</sup> One such author is P. F. Mittag, who, in a 2002 paper, re-examined the Parthian beard as worn by Demetrios II of the Seleucids. In this he reacted to the writings of Justin, and the conclusions that were drawn from these writings. What Justin describes is the following: The capture of Demetrios II<sup>119</sup>; his initial positive treatment by the Arsacids, who wanted to exploit him to stir up rivalry between him and his brother as well as create a dynastic link with the Seleucids through marriage<sup>120</sup>; Demetrios' repeated attempts to escape his captivity, and his subsequent re-captures and punishments<sup>121</sup>; his eventual release from captivity and his renewed claim to the

<sup>114</sup> For example, E. S. Gruen, 'Hellenistic kingship: puzzles, problems and possibilities' in: P. Bilde e.a. (eds.), *Aspects of Hellenistic kingship* (Aarhus 1996) 116-125.

<sup>115</sup> Fleischer, 'Hellenistic royal iconography', 38.

<sup>116</sup> C. Lorber and P. Iossif, 'Seleucid campaign beards', *l'Antiquité Classique* 78 (2009) 87-115, 87.

<sup>117</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 12

<sup>118</sup> Lorber, Iossif, 'Seleucid campagin beards', 89-90.

<sup>119</sup> Just. 36.1.5-6

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 38.9.3-10.1

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 38.10.5-11

throne.<sup>122</sup> What we also see is a discrepancy between the coinage minted in the first period of Demetrios' reign and the second (post-capture). On the former, he does not wear a beard; on the latter, he does.

This has led many scholars in the past to believe that the beard and his stay with the Parthians were related, even going so far as to start calling Demetrios' beard a 'Parthian beard'.<sup>123</sup> However, Mittag posits that this was actually an Achaemenid beard. According to him, because the Parthians said that they were descended from the Persians (which he says is proven by their use of Persian titles, such as 'Great King'), Mithradates' bearded coinage is also a way for the Parthians to refer to their Persian heritage. After this sweeping statement, he goes back to the case of Demetrios. Mittag convincingly argues that he had started towards wearing a beard before, in the form of sideburns as well as some short beards at different intervals; as well as that, not all the mint houses struck the same portraits.<sup>124</sup> Looking at previous coinage and other associations, he finally concludes that the bearded portrait is a reference to Zeus. This is also what is said by L. Günther, who compared the coins to Macedonian and Sicilian coinage. The figure on the obverse can either be Zeus with the features of Demetrios, or Demetrios acting as Zeus.<sup>125</sup>

We here have seen one interpretation: the Seleucid beard as referring to Zeus, and the Parthian beard (briefly) as Persian. The two have nothing to do with each other, but they are also not, apparently, influenced by each other.

A different and influential theory has recently explored the significance of the beard more thoroughly than before. Lorber and Iossif picked up on the reference that they were supposed to be campaign beards in several sources, and pleaded a convincing case that the beards on the coinage of several kings (most importantly, Seleukos II) were part of a military campaign.<sup>126</sup> In the case of a war, especially one that was far away or involved insurgent peoples, the king would make a vow to the gods. The vow was that he would not shave his beard until the war was won. The authors see evidence that, during long campaigns, the king's beard would actually grow.<sup>127</sup> When we look at their interpretation of the beard of Demetrios, they arrive at a completely different conclusion than Mittag had: first, that Demetrios' beard already appeared long before his extended period of captivity, and that he started wearing it the moment he set out to campaign against the Parthians.<sup>128</sup> When he briefly recaptured Seleucia shortly after Mithradates' death (ca. 140-138, the date is uncertain), he did not shave it off. They see this as an indication that he had vowed to recapture all of the Seleucids' former territory. The fact that his beard remained (and grew longer) after his captivity could

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> For example, J. Eckhel, *Doctrina numorum veterum*, Vienna 1792-1798, vol. 3, 230-231.

<sup>124</sup> P. F. Mittag, 'Beim Barte des Demetrios: Überlegungen zur parthischen Gefangenschaft Demetrios' II.', *Klio* 84 (2002) 373-399, 391-393.

<sup>125</sup> Linda-Marie Günther, 'Herrschler als Götter – Götter als Herrscher? Zur Ambivalenz hellenistischer Münzbilder', in: L.-M. Günther and S. Plischke eds., *Studien zum vorhellenistischen und hellenistischen Herrscherkult: Verdichtung und Erweiterung von Traditionsgeflechten*. Oikumene. Studien zur antiken Weltgeschichte 9 (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2011) 89- 113

<sup>126</sup> Lorber and Iossif, 'Seleucid campaign beards', 90-91.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

be a sign that he had failed in his previous mission, had not fulfilled his vow to the gods and was not yet justified in shaving off his beard.<sup>129</sup>

Of course, what Demetrios II does not necessarily have anything to do with what Mithradates I did around 148 BCE.<sup>130</sup> What it does tell us is that there was an established tradition present in the Seleucid Empire. And although the research of Lorber and Iossif does not completely invalidate that of Mittag, it has a better timeline for Demetrios and takes into account the tradition of growing out a beard within the Seleucid dynasty—as well as in earlier Greek thought. It at least gives us another idea about why the Parthians started portraying themselves wearing a beard.

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<sup>129</sup> As a sidenote, Lorber and Iossif support this theory by citing the disappearance of certain sides of Apollo from Demetrios' later coinage. The king replaces Apollo with Zeus on his tetradrachms, perhaps rejecting this incarnation of Apollo for not helping him succeed.

<sup>130</sup> According to Mittag, the first bearded portrait was minted between 148 and 141 BCE, but because of the strong identification of the first tetradrachms being struck around 141, an earlier date seems preferable.

## The royal archer

When one reads written works on the Parthians, one is struck by a lack of descriptions of the actual king. We do get accounts of how a king behaved, but it seems that descriptions of the king and his court were hard to come by. We finally get a description of an audience with the king when Cassius Dio talks about Phraates IV (r. 38-2 BCE). Albeit short, it is very striking:

After this, when men were sent to him [Phraates IV] by Antony, he held a conference with them seated upon a golden chair and twanging his bowstring; he first inveighed against them at length, but finally promised that he would grant peace, if they would straightway remove their camp.

κάκ τούτου τοῖς τε πεμφθεῖσιν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐχρημάτισεν ἐπί τε χρυσοῦ δίφρου καθήμενος καὶ τὴν νευρὰν τοῦ τόξου ψάλλων, καὶ καταδραμὼν αὐτοὺς πολλὰ τέλος τὴν εἰρήνην, ἃν γε παραχρῆμα ἀποστρατοπεδεύσωνται, δώσειν ὑπέσχετο.<sup>131</sup>

Without overanalyzing the rest of the passage, it is easy to imagine the king, seated, plucking at his bow-string. It is not a far stretch to think that this was inspired by one of the most used reverse images in Parthian coinage: the archer. Although subject to changes throughout time, the base image remains the same. We have seen it many times in the previous chapters: an archer to the right, sitting down (either on one knee or on something of a seat), one arm outstretched, holding a bow. He wears pants that are traditionally nomadic, and he wears a *bashlyk*. This archer-type is present on coinage of Arsaces I through to a certain point of Mithradates' reign. As well as that, it becomes almost standard on tetradrachms of later Parthian rulers—so standard, in fact, that anyone who would have handled Parthian coinage would have recognized Dio's description of Phraates.

So far, the archer seems to be a typical Parthian symbol. And indeed, it is: archery was what the Parthians were known for. One tactic especially was made famous by the Parthians: while riding horseback, they would seemingly retreat, and then they would turn around and shoot their bow and arrows, surprising the enemy. This lead to the term 'Parthian shot': a barbed insult, made as the speaker is leaving. As such, the archer might be a symbol of the Parthians' prowess in this field.

Because of the attire the archer wears, it has also been theorized that the archer is Arsakes I. As the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, and the one who started the expansion of the Parthian empire, this would not be a strange decision, especially considering the fact that all subsequent kings used his name on their coinage (ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ). However, Arsakes had to have made a decision himself. Whoever he turned out to be, where does the origin of the archer lay?

As these things go, there are two theories that seem to be the most likely. One is that the archer is derived from the Persian gold darics. This coin started being minted under Darius the Great, in the very late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The coin type was actually called 'archers' by the Greeks, as the currency spread through Persia and its neighboring lands.<sup>132</sup> The use of the daric is slightly different from that of other coinage in this time, at least under the rule of one

<sup>131</sup> Cass. Dio 49.27.4, trans. Loeb Classical Library edition, 1917.

<sup>132</sup> P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A history of the Persian Empire* (2002) 408.

single king. We usually assume that coins were minted to pay soldiers with, or to facilitate trade, but Briant posits that darics were mostly used to promote the king's image.<sup>133</sup> He says that it was the silver *siculus* that paid the soldiers' wages, something that is confirmed by the fact that Greek cities on the coastal regions of the Persian Empire were allowed, for a long time, to keep minting their own coinage. The *siculus* was also not in line with the weight standard of the daric, and neither (unsurprisingly) were they in line with the Attic weight standard.<sup>134</sup> The denomination is too large to be used as regular pay, and tributary reform cause it to not be mainly minted for that purpose.<sup>135</sup> Possibly, the golden daric was used in different ways: one, financial, because minting the gold that was mined in Sardis increased its value; another, political, because there was now a standard for gold coinage; and finally, ideological, since the coins spread the image of the king which in turn legitimized him as the true ruler of the region. Because of this function, it seems likely that the coins would have been spread in a variety of ways, as tribute but also as gifts. As well as that, as we mentioned before, we saw that the coins attained something of a status, even gaining their own nickname amongst the Greeks. It is not unlikely to assume that they would have been a familiar item amongst those who would come in contact with such large denominations.

Now, if we look at the coin itself, we could easily argue that the Parthian royal archer was inspired by the Persian one. On it, we see a bearded figure wearing a crenellated crown, sitting on one knee, holding a bow to the right. The coin has been stamped on one side only, leaving the reverse an impression of the obverse. The figure portrayed is the king, of course, causing not just his image to spread, but also his reputation in battle.

The Parthian archer is similar enough to this image that we can compare it. The positions of the legs, the outstretched bow and the head in profile are clearly similar, even though the Parthian coinage is more refined and very clearly Parthian in style and dress.

The other theory is that the archer has been derived from a Seleucid type. We have talked before about the Apollo type in Seleucid numismatics, it being one of the most prevalent coins in the Seleucid Empire up to the reign of Demetrios II. Apollo, as mentioned above, was one of the most important deities for the Seleucid dynasty, serving as a protector and a symbol of these Greeks in Asia. But Apollo himself may have had a compound meaning in Seleucid ideology. In a convincing article, Kyle Erickson argued that Apollo and Nabû, a local deity, were used at the same time in order to reach different parts of the population.<sup>136</sup> In this piece, he argues that Antiochus I, at least, was aware of the deities and customs of the people of Babylonia, and that the portrayal of Apollo on coins was significant because of the figure itself as well as the way that he was portrayed. Apollo and Nabû were both sons of the head of the Pantheon, and they were both oracular gods. The way in which Apollo was portrayed on coinage could cause some confusion: he could be holding a spear or an arrow, which would have been in line with Apollo himself, or he could have been holding a stylus, which would have been in line with Nabû's function as a scribal god.<sup>137</sup> Deliberate confusion could have caused a Babylonian to see it as a stylus, and a Greek as a spear or an arrow.

<sup>133</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 409.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>136</sup> K. Erickson, 'Apollo-Nabû: the Babylonian policy of Antiochus I' in: K. Erickson, G. Ramsey (eds.), *Seleucid Dissolution: the Sinking of the Anchor* (Wiesbaden 2011) 51-65.

<sup>137</sup> Erickson, 'Apollo-Nabû', 58-59.

If this is the case, then it should not be too much of a stretch to argue that the archer on Parthian numismatics could be a combination of the two theories above. Although Persian coinage was struck centuries before the coming of Arsakes I, let alone Mithradates I, the imagery was certainly striking enough to reach places that could not use it as legal tender. It is not unthinkable that the precious golden coins would have been used as gifts long after the fall of the Persian Empire, for example in weddings or other ceremonial occasions. They were surely fine enough to use in such a way. And Seleucid coins would naturally have found their way to a satrapy, whether they were used for soldiers' wages, tribute or gifts. If we believe that both images, which were not so different in their iconography, were seen by large parts of the population (at least those in urban centers where coin would have been used) it would have been useful to combine the two. By portraying a kneeling or sitting archer, there is the reference to the Achaemenid Empire as well as the more familiar Seleucid Empire. A more clear connection to the Seleucid Empire came with the *omphalos*, which we will discuss in the next section. Of course, the *bashlyk* and the rest of the archer's clothing would have identified him as firmly Parthian.

What would this have done? It would have meant both a reference to a mythological past, from which most Parthian subjects were far removed but would have known about in a general sense. But it was also a reference to the present, in the shape of a neighboring and rivalling dynasty. Using this type meant a certain amount of continuity with the previous rule, though naturally the situation was now improved. It meant that the Parthians were not there merely to take the land and sack the cities, but they were there to protect and give a future to this territory.

### The *omphalos*

We have seen before that Mithradates mostly copied the reverse types from the earlier Arsacids. When we look at the seated archer from coin to coin, very little actually changes: the direction in which he faces is switched, but that is the only big change to the iconography until the reign of Mithradates. But already on the first coin struck under his reign we see something changing in this type. The archer now no longer sits on a stool. Instead, he sits on something half-round. The object is cross-hatched. It doesn't look like a stool, nor does it look like the throne the later Arsacid archers were seated on.

Because of the cross-hatching, the shape and the other similarities mentioned in the previous section, we have strong grounds to believe that this is actually supposed to be a depiction of an *omphalos*. The literal meaning of this word is 'navel', but metaphorically it meant the center of the world.<sup>138</sup> The most well-known *omphalos* was located in Delphi, in the sanctuary of Apollo. This object made Delphi seem as if it was the center of the world in Greek thought – and it was described as such by Greek writers.<sup>139</sup>

Why is it that Mithradates started using the *omphalos* as a symbol on his coinage? We have seen in Sellwood that he uses this from the first type on. It has been theorized that it was

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<sup>138</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah17306/full>. Accessed 11-06-2014.

<sup>139</sup> Strab. 9.3.6

pictured as such to commemorate their victory over the Seleucids.<sup>140</sup> This would have strong implications for the power of the Parthians, perhaps equating Arsakes I (if it is supposed to be him holding the bow) with Delphi, and the center of the world. This could be the case if this was a victory emission, as can be theorized. However, if this is not the case, there could be another reason for it. Precisely because this is the first type that Mithradates struck, it is important to note the small changes from the previous mints—and of course, we did not see the *omphalos* there. Besides having important symbolic consequences (Parthia being the new center) it could also be a reference to Seleucid coinage as such. If we look at the Apollo type that was described above, we see that figure sitting on something very similar to what we see on Parthian coinage. The way this image has been given shape is so similar to the Seleucid image that we cannot but compare the two. It would be both a symbolical gesture (one of taking over a role) as well as a familiar image to the Parthians' new subjects.

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<sup>140</sup> G. F. Assar and M. G. Bagloo, ‘An early Parthian “victory” coin’, *Parthica* 8 (2006) 25-35, 25.

## Other aspects of change

The last type of coins minted under Mithradates is especially interesting in our story. Not only is it the only type to feature tetradrachms, but the reverses are very different from what we have seen before. The fact that we now have a tetradrachm is attributed to the conquest of Margiana and later Seleucia, which had a much higher Greek population than any of the land the Parthians had previously visited.<sup>141</sup> We will look at the tetradrachm and the drachm from this type to determine what changes we see and why we see them.

### Herakles

Although we can never be sure as to who implemented the change, what we do see is a completely different reverse. We have what some might call a stereotypical Herakles figure. The nude body faces forward and the head is turned to the left. He is holding a cup, a club and a lion skin, without a doubt identifying him as Herakles. Coupled with the obverse type (bearded, with diadem, facing right) as well as the legend (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ) this coin has clearly been influenced by Seleucid types.

However, it is all too easy to simply assume that Herakles was a Greek symbol, and that Mithradates used it to emulate ‘Greekness’ and in the process placate the Greeks. There are some issues here that we should keep in mind if we want to find out what this symbol truly meant.

First, we should once again think about the minting authority. Who decided what should be put on the coins? As established earlier, it is likely that the king gave at least an indication of what his ideological message should be. This takes the control out of the hands of the Seleucia mint itself. Mithradates had already made some radical changes to his coinage before conquering Seleucia; the changes to the obverse were kept on this new tetradrachm, the reverse is the only thing that changed in this case.

Another issue is the role of Herakles in the Hellenistic East. Of course, he was a Greek hero, and we know that he was very popular in Greece itself. But from the time of Alexander the Great, he became symbolic of something greater, and with great mass appeal. This happened, at least in part, by a partial identification of Herakles with other, local deities. In this case, as we also saw with the Apollo-type and the archer, we should not ask ourselves what a certain deity *was*. Instead, we should accept that in a dynamic environment it was possible for a statue of a deity to represent several things at once. This could mean that different viewers saw different things, or that one viewer saw several things. In the case of Herakles, there are several examples of depictions of Herakles that might also represent more traditional deities. For example, tesserae in Palmyra have been found depicting Herakles’ attributes with the name ‘Nergal’ written on the back.<sup>142</sup> This is an example of a local deity being associated with Herakles. Numismatic evidence also confirms the re-imagining of Herakles in an Eastern context. A Phoenician coin from Ptolemais-Aco has a local river god give Herakles a healing herb after his fight with the Hydra, thus re-interpreting the original

<sup>141</sup> E. Dabrowa, ‘The political propaganda of the first Arsacids and its targets: from Arsaces I to Mithradates II’ *Parthica* 10 (2008) 25-31, 27.

<sup>142</sup> T. Kaizer, ‘The “Heracles Figure” at Hatra and Palmyra: Problems of Interpretation’ *Iraq* 62 (2000), 219-232, 223. This is not saying that there is complete identification of the one with the other, but it does mean that there is an association, where two different deities are used on the same object.

myths in a local context.<sup>143</sup> A local mint decided to produce this coin, knowing that those who handled it would understand the message. But Herakles travelled further than the Levant, and further even than Iraq. The Bactrian kings that preceded the conquests of the Arsacids clearly put Herakles on their coinage. The Greco-Bactrian king Demetrios I had a coin minted that showed him wearing an elephant's skin on the obverse, and Herakles standing on the reverse (see plate 10). The obverse is taken to refer to Alexander, as this coin was meant to commemorate Demetrios' own successes in India. The reverse is strikingly similar to Mithradates' tetradrachms: Herakles has the same stance, and the legend is placed in the same position.

What was done to Herakles in the Hellenistic East is part of a process of adaptation to new material. The fact of the matter is that Herakles was introduced to the people in Palmyra, Hatra and Seleucia, as well as Bactria and India. The figure of Herakles was adaptable enough that he became an intercultural symbolic figure. He could be seen as different things by different people.

### **Zeus**

Another common type is a Zeus type, sitting on a throne holding a scepter and an eagle. The legend is the same, although ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ is often left out. If we wish to know where this image came from, we should not immediately look towards the Seleucids; they did not often feature Zeus in their iconography, as Apollo had mainly taken the reins up until this point.<sup>144</sup> However, in everyday religion Zeus had been acting as a replacement or equation with local gods, especially pantheon heads.

When Mithradates starts minting Hercules and Zeus on the reverses of the tetradrachms and drachms from Seleucia it is a notable change. It is also somewhat of an anomaly when taking later coinage into consideration, as neither would feature regularly on later Parthian coinage. This infers a change with clear intent, especially considering the high value of tetradrachms. These coins circulated widely because of this value, and as such will have spread a message far beyond the local sphere of influence. Why did Mithradates not choose to put a typically Parthian image on the reverse of these important coins? Precisely *because* of their impact we can conclude that this was meant to send a message to the Greek population. The message that the Parthian king was friendly to the Hellenes (obviously mirrored in S13), but also that they were continuing in a Seleucid tradition. Even when we do not take the meaning of the Greek titles into consideration, the very fact that all of the legends are in Greek from Mithradates I on says a considerable deal. Other clues point toward an adoption of Greek tradition. The way the king's portrait on the obverse is facing is a reference to Seleucid coinage, as well as the quality of execution of the mint dies used, high aesthetic levels, and the placement of the legend.<sup>145</sup>

When it comes to lower denominations such as diobols and obols, furthermore, we see the same trend. Areas with a high percentage of Greeks minted reverses with Greek elements

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<sup>143</sup> Kaizer, 'The Herakles figure', 229.

<sup>144</sup> Strikingly, after his release from Parthian captivity, Demetrios started introducing other deities to the Seleucid iconographic program.

<sup>145</sup> Dabrowa, 'The political propaganda of the first Arsacids', 26.

(the Dioscuri, Nike on a *biga* et. al.). Conversely, areas with a high percentage of non-Greeks often struck coinage that had Parthian imagery.<sup>146</sup>

What we have seen in this section is a great amount of innovation when it comes to the coin types that Mithradates struck. New portraits, titles and reverses all confirm the same thing: that the Parthian king was reinventing the royal image. He wanted to show himself as a new type of king, unlike any other Parthian ruler, and unlike any Seleucid ruler. The images were well-thought-out and could speak to a multitude of peoples without letting those who used the coins forget that he was a Parthian king.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 27.

## **Part 3: Numismatics after Mithradates I**

### **Phraates II**

Phraates II was Mithradates' son and succeeded him upon his death in 138 BCE. He reigned until 127 BCE. When he ascended the throne, he was still very young, which numismatists point out as the reason the beard on his coins is very short.<sup>147</sup> The country was governed by his mother as a regent until the young king came of age. He was often away for war, as the Eastern provinces were under attack by the Seleucids. Eventually, his preoccupations with this area lead to the loss of Babylonia for the Parthians. Although he was eventually able to retake Mesopotamia, he was not able to enjoy it for long, as he was called away to combat a rebellion of the Saka in the East. Captured Greeks who Phraates had mistreated eventually caused an uprising and the king was killed in the melee that followed.

The earliest coins, at least, followed Elymaean prototypes, probably because Elymais was a newly conquered province and Phraates needed to be shown as a solid ruler of this region. Some tetradrachms also feature monograms, by which we can more easily find out where the coin was struck.

On the first type, S14, we see a portrait of the king facing right. He wears a diadem and a short beard (or long sideburns). On the reverse there is a male deity sitting on an *omphalos*, holding a bow in his hanging left arm and a long object in his extended right arm. This is most likely an arrow or a pen, reminiscent of the Apollo/Nabu of the Seleucid coinage.<sup>148</sup> The legend says ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ, with a monogram on the left of the legend and dating in the exergue.

On the second type the king is facing left instead of right, his beard is more pronounced and he is wearing a torque around his neck. The reverse is, once again, the traditional Parthian archer facing right. He is only holding a bow and is clothed, as opposed to the Apollo figure of the previous type. The legend says ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ. There does not seem to be any monogram or dating in the exergue. The drachms are the same as the tetradrachms. This legend is very similar to the later drachms of Mithradates I.

Type 16 has no tetradrachms, but it has several different types of drachms. The obverse portrait is identical to that of type 15; the reverse is the Parthian archer with a four-line legend and a monogram in the exergue. The legends read: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ / ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ, although the way in which this is written differs from sub-type to sub-type. The mints are diverse, including Ecbatana, Nisa and Rhagae. The legend has the same function as ΘΕΟΣ had one Mithradates' drachm—evoking a certain amount of divinity by use of the word on an object that is used daily. In Phraates' case, it refers not to himself but to the divinity of his father. This is merely a more 'modest' and indirect way of achieving the same goal.

The last type minted under Phraates II is different again. We see the king facing right again, wearing a short beard and a diadem. On the reverse is a complicated mix of symbols: a half-naked male deity holding a cornucopia in his left hand, with a *polos*-like crown on his head. In his right hand he holds a small Nike, who in turn is extending a victory wreath to the

<sup>147</sup> Sellwood, *Coinage of Parthia*, 40.

<sup>148</sup> Erickson, 'Apollo-Nabû: the Babylonian policy of Antiochus I'.

deity. The deity is uncertain, but the presence of Nike and the wreath are clear-cut references to victory in battle, as well as the importance of the king in attaining this victory. The legend confirms this message: it reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΣ. There are several monograms in the exergue. The drachms of this type have a similar obverse, but on the reverse we see a Nike standing frontal, facing left, holding a palm branch in her right hand and a wreath in her extended left hand. The legend is the same, and there is usually a monogram in the exergue. This whole type, which was put out at the same time, is trying to bring across a message of victory.

### Inter-regnal issue

Between the death of Phraates II and the rule of Artabanos I, his uncle and brother of Mithradates I, there was a short time of confusion in Babylonia and Mesopotamia about the rule. Phraates had left a governor, Himerus, in charge of Babylonia before he had left to subdue the Saka. Himerus himself was later removed from his position by Hyspaosines, a prince of Charax.

The type itself, S18, is a confusing combination of previous types. The obverse bears the portrait of a man with a long beard, facing right, wearing a diadem. The portrait looks very similar to those of the later Mithradates I, who had died over a decade earlier. The reverse is a clothed goddess sitting on a throne supported by a Nereid. In her left arm she holds a cornucopia, and on her extended right palm stands Nike who is crowning the goddess with a victory wreath or diadem. The legend reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ.

The figure on the obverse should probably be seen as Mithradates I. Because of the political turmoil it was unsure which person should actually be portrayed on the coinage and because of Mithradates' successes (and because tetradrachms were still needed) he was a safe bet until there was an official ruler. This was not uncommon; in fact, it had also been done before the Parthians arrived.<sup>149</sup> In this way, the mint of Seleucia could continue to put out material, but it did not have to make a political statement, nor would it be in danger of angering one of the rivalling parties.

### Artabanos I

Artabanos I was the brother of Mithradates I, and ascended the throne after the short interregnal period after his nephew's death. He was mostly kept busy in the East, facing the same troubles Phraates II had, but at the end of his reign the Parthian shad regained their grasp on Mesopotamia. Because Mesopotamia was not under Parthian ruler for the first part of his reign, the earlier types have no tetradrachms.

Type S19 shows the king, facing left, wearing a diadem and a modest beard. The detail on this coin is shown in the fine hair as well as the small details on the king's clothing. The reverse has the Parthian archer on an *omphalos*. The legend reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ. There are lines between the words, dividing them. The legend here is similar to the legends of his predecessors. Especially telling is the use of ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ: it indicates a loyalty to family, which could have been especially important after the tumultuous time that preceded Artabanos' ascent to the throne. Naturally it also

<sup>149</sup> Sellwood, 'Parthian coins', 283.

referred to the gods, but in this case it could have been a clever way to refer back to the previous kings.

Type 20 is very similar, with the same ob- and reverse. The only change is in the legend, where it now says ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ, or, ‘loving his brother’. This almost does the same thing as the previous epithet, but it gives the people who handled this coinage a clear reference: the glorious time when the strong ruler Mithradates I conquered the territory Artabanos is now trying to protect. It instills within Artabanos the values and strengths of his brother Mithradates. Without explicitly putting the image of this brother on there, this would have made people think of Mithradates, but it would still be clear that Artabanos was an autonomous king who would have the same qualities as Mithradates.

The next type brings the return of the tetradrachms, and these are equally fine. The king, facing right, has a medium-length beard and wears a diadem, an earring and a torque. On the reverse we see a clothed goddess holding a cornucopia, sitting on a throne supported by a Nereid. In her right extended hand she holds Nike, who is crowning the goddess with a victory wreath or diadem. The legend reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ, and there is a monogram to the left of the legend. The iconographical language on this coin is so clear that it is almost too obvious. A goddess holding a cornucopia represents the wealth of Artabanos’ reign; Nike crowning her is a symbol both of victory and of the wealth that victory brings. War may be unwanted at first, but it is waged to create more wealth. And in Artabanos’ case, it obviously leads to victory.

Artabanos’ last type, S22, is only composed of drachms. The king, wearing a diadem, faces left. He has a medium-length beard. On the reverse sits the Parthian archer facing left, sitting on an *omphalos*. The legend is either four- or five-lined, reading: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ) ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΝ ΦΙΛΗΕΛΑΕΝΟΣ. There is one drachm sub-type in which the legend is now arranged in a square (which would become the standard way of arranging legends), and reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ. This last epithet can be roughly translated to ‘the revealed’. As such, it is clear that it has a divine association. Interestingly enough, this title did not appear on any of the Seleucia mints, nor on coins minted in Susa—both places that were highly Hellenized.<sup>150</sup> What this may indicate is that the message was not meant specifically for the Greek population, but instead was meant for those whose culture was closer to that of the Arsacids themselves.

What we have seen in this chapter is both tradition and innovation. We have seen that Phraates and Artabanos used new iconographical signals to communicate with their audience. Victory especially was a recurring theme, which is striking in conjunction with the social and military unrest that was actually par for the course in these times. We also see that they continued Mithradates’ example: some of the titles as well as the archer on the back of several of their types. The most important innovation, perhaps, is the type of ruler portrait they display.

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<sup>150</sup> E. Dabrowa, ‘ΑΡΣΑΚΗΣ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΗΣ. Were the Arsacid deities ‘revealed’?’ *Studi Ellenistici* 24 (2010) 223–230, 226.

# **Chapter 4**

## **The culture of kingship**

It has by now become clear that Mithradates I and his predecessors and successors were able to communicate with their audience in a variety of ways. What Mithradates did was, to a large extent, appropriation and invention. Kings that had gone before him, both Arsacid and other, influenced him and inspired him to create this form of propaganda. Because of this, it may seem that he was being inconsistent or untruthful, when in reality every king had to have done that. From Alexander's diadem to Mithradates' diadem, nothing actually developed organically. Both examples, and all of the other diadems in between, were interpreted and re-interpreted to fit a new situation. The same goes for everything else that we have discussed so far.

When it comes to a display of royal identity, we have now seen that Mithradates used several ways to legitimize his rule through the projection of a certain identity. To recapitulate, what we have seen from him is:

1. Dynastic legitimization. Through his connection to the previous rulers in the Arsacid line, Mithradates has shown that he is the logical next one in line. By deifying his father and not Arsakes I, he was ensured of a divine forefather; by using the Arsacid name, he was able to put himself in line of the establishment of the Parthian empire. This gave Mithradates a solid identity as a Parthian, while leaving other means of communication and culture open.
2. Using Greek and multi-interpretable elements on coins. We have seen that the obverse faced the same way as Seleucid obverses faced; that the diadem, which had meaning in many different cultures, was adopted; that Mithradates used epithets that both connected him with and distanced him from the Greek population; the beard as a symbol of a vow for victory as well as, perhaps, a Parthian cultural symbol.

We have seen that Mithradates attempted to cater to the interests and backgrounds of different parts of the populace. Locations with a large percentage of Greeks received different messages than those where there were mainly Iranians. However, some messages were universal, and they were meant to reach a larger audience. By using symbols that had international value this may have been possible.

Parthian coinage changed from its traditional shape to something reminiscent of Seleucid coinage as well as using other cultural symbols in order to appeal to a wider audience. But in order for that to have worked, there had to have been certain conditions. One, that the cultural elements were understood by the people they were aimed at; two, that inhabitants of the empire felt the need to associate with their ruler. The former has already been established earlier in this paper. We have seen evidence of iconography that would have been meaningful to different groups, such as Herakles and the diadem. As well as that, we have concluded that Greek culture in the Hellenistic East was a malleable substance that not only meant different things to different people but which was often manipulated by inhabitants of urban centers. In this way, local deities and new ('Greek') deities were

connected, and cities attained a shared heritage that would have bound the multi-cultural centers together. The second condition (the need for association with a ruler) is more difficult to prove, but it all ties in with a perceived need for a ruler.

Within the context of an empire, there are always different factors at play. In most situations (as well as in the one that we are concerned with) there used to be a situation in which there was not a conqueror who ruled. Some of the regions that Mithradates ruled over had not been subject to a large, outside force; others had been subject to the Seleucids for almost two hundred years. While former Seleucid subjects would have been used to a force of this measure, others would not have been. Because they had only known local rulers (such as chieftains), it is possible that these people would have placed the new Arsacid ruler on a higher level than their own, local and known rulers. It is even possible that they placed a king who ruled over such large amounts of land and people on a level that included ancestors and deities.<sup>151</sup> But it is also important to think about those who were already used to conquerors and emperors; after all, they were now used to the way this relationship worked, and the elite especially would greatly benefit from unchanged business and social relations. This is why courts are so important when considering political and military relations in the Hellenistic Age: without the support of a court an Empire of the size we are looking at here would not have been able to exist longer than a generation. The king needed a court as much as the court needed that same ruler, because without him they would have far less influence in a world that was ever-expanding. The outcome of wars and well-run trade routes all depended on a good ruler, and a good relationship and understanding with this ruler. So, it is clear that the elite as well as other parts of the population needed to identify with their king. What could we say about the situation in the cities (and so, the opinions of the elite) during a regime change? In order to understand what happened to Mithradates' rule, we should look into this.

### The situation in the cities

Scholars have been looking at Parthian coins for a long time, as we have seen before. Lately, the conclusion has been that the reason Mithradates' coinage changed was that he needed to cater to the Greek population.<sup>152</sup> Supposedly, the reason for this was that the rich elite of the cities were still supportive of the Seleucids. As a result, during a struggle the Seleucids would have had the advantage of money and influence. What is this idea based on?

The basis of this theory mostly seems to come from a passage in Justin. In this, it is stated that:

As the cities, in consequence, began every where to revolt from his government, he resolved, in order to wipe off the stain of effeminacy from his character, to make war upon the Parthians. The people of the east beheld his approach with pleasure, both on account of the cruelty of Arsacides, king of the Parthians, and because having been accustomed to the old government of the Macedonians, they viewed the pride of the new race with indignation.

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<sup>151</sup> Friedman, 'Notes on culture and identity', 30; on the possibility of a ruler cult, see earlier in this piece.

<sup>152</sup> For example, Dabrowa, 'The political propaganda of the first Arsacids', 28, but it is an idea that has been used by many other scholars as well.

*Itaque cum ab imperio eius passim ciuitates deficerent, ad abolendam segnitiae maculam bellum Parthis inferre statuit; cuius aduentum non inuiti Orientis populi uidere et propter Arsacidae, regis Parthorum, crudelitatem et quod ueteri Macedonum imperio adsueti noui populi superbiam indigne ferebant.*<sup>153</sup>

As can be read above, the motivation for the cities' loyalty to the Seleucids is twofold: on the one hand, they feel that the Arsacids were excessively cruel; on the other, they were used to the rule of the Seleucids and would have welcomed this familiarity. The former point is interesting, but it should be taken with a grain of salt. For one, immediately after this passage Justin mentions that the Parthians treated Demetrios kindly and with dignity after they had taken him captive.<sup>154</sup> The character sketch seems inconsistent at best. We have also previously discussed the problem with using ancient authors as sources for knowledge about the behavior of the Parthians. They were too far removed for one, and Justin's position makes it difficult to believe any judgments he made about the Parthians. The Parthians had been enemies of the Roman Empire for quite some time, and Justin (who wrote in the second or third century CE, under the Roman Empire) was far from a neutral observer. This is not even taking into account the fact that the events he wrote about happened hundreds of years before his birth.

As such, it is less of a stretch to believe that the citizens of the cities were more used to the Seleucids' rule and wished to bring it back. The security of knowing what to expect, especially in an area and time where rulers were often uncertain of their lives, could go a long way. The Seleucids could certainly have had allies in those who were familiar with them and wished for stability. At the same time, that makes it plausible that Mithradates would have felt the need to appeal to the tastes of these people, and get them on his side. By emphasizing continuity and familiarity he may have been able to do so.

### A new but familiar ruler

In the previous chapters, we have seen that Mithradates' coinage reflects different paths. In a way, yes, we see many elements that are similar to Seleucid coinage. The way the portrait on the obverse faces after S12 is one, the beard is another, and the *omphalos* that the archer is sitting on is a third. In that way, the coins of the Parthian kings must have been at least slightly familiar to people who were subject to both and who lived in that transitory period when the Seleucid Empire was fighting to stay alive. However, it would be too easy to say that these things were copied from Seleucid coinage. As we have established, the minted propaganda was probably a reflection of the opinions and ideals of the court; as Mithradates' court was not the same court as that of the Seleucid king, it would not be logical that they would mint the same things for the same reasons.

Coins were spread widely throughout empires. If they are legal tender in a place where it is common to use coined money instead of trading, it is only logical that they would be used to pay for goods. Coins are not made to stay in one place—especially coins of a higher value, such as drachms and tetradrachms. When considering what reason coins were minted, we should consider the entirety of the picture: local sensibilities as well as those of people who lived further away. A coin that could speak to many different people would have more effect

<sup>153</sup> Just. 36.1.3-4, trans.: J.S. Watson (London 1853).

<sup>154</sup> Just. 36.1.10.

than a coin that only spoke to one group of people. And what of the people that we described above, the inhabitants of the cities that had been loyal to the Seleucids? They certainly would not have accepted a radical change, as they already had to adjust to a new ruler. A familiar type of kingship would be preferable, but did Mithradates continue the work of the Seleucids? Only in as much that some of the images were similar to those of the Seleucids. Certain groups of people would have been affected by those images, as it would give them the sense that little has changed and that this new ruler would care for them as well as the previous ruler. Other groups, however, would see something different in the same image. If we remember the cultural theories we talked about earlier, we could imagine different people: a bride who had a necklace made out of golden Persian coins would see the Parthian archer and remember the kneeling archer on the darics; a descendant of a Greek family would see the *omphalos* and focus on that part of the same image. Similarly, someone who identified with Greek culture would have seen Herakles and think of the Greek hero, but a Bactrian saw Herakles as an international symbol and would feel just as connected to this figure as the Greek.

In the end, it comes down to a belief in both the diversity of the court and the intelligence of the king. If both are deemed positive, then we should not find it difficult to believe that the images on Parthian coinage were intentionally minted to speak to different groups at once. And if this succeeded, Mithradates would have been familiar but innovative, new but strong, Parthian but friendly to any culture that was now under his rule.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapters we have made a long journey. We have travelled from the Parthian heartland to Babylonia, and we have looked at material from the age of the Persians through to the Roman Empire. Although the question we wanted to answer is one of identity, we looked at coinage to answer big parts of this question. Using coinage was a way for the rulers of antiquity to communicate with their subjects, especially when the king was often far away from them. Empires like that of the Parthians needed a way to show the majority of the subjects what kind of a ruler they were: coinage speaks to the educated as well as the illiterate, the rich as well as people simply working in the markets, to cities and villages. The abundance of numismatic material left by the Parthians has made this an excellent medium to use when asking further questions.

Because we wished to know more about Parthian culture, we had to look into theories about culture and identity. ‘Culture’ as a concept is hard to define, but the working definition throughout this paper has been that it is a set of practices and interpretations that is malleable and changeable. Everyone has a different interpretation of culture, whether it is their own or someone else’s, and that interpretation will influence their interaction with other people. This has been important to keep in mind when looking at Mithradates’ coins and the projected identity.

In the part of the paper in which we looked at the coins themselves we saw some very interesting changes. Thematically, we looked at:

- The diadem. When Mithradates I went from portraying himself wearing a *bashlyk* to wearing a diadem, he broke with Parthian tradition and adopted a more international tradition. Alexander the Great was the first one to give it a single, royal meaning, but it had meaning for people in many different areas before that. The diadem was widely used by kings in the Hellenistic period. As such, its meaning was not bound to a single location: the most important aspect was its meaning as a symbol of kingship and autonomy.
- Titles. We looked at which titles were used on Mithradates’ coinage, and how they changed over time. The Parthian tradition has remained important on all of the coins, which we see reflected in the continuous use of the word ‘ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ’. Otherwise, what we see is a gradual change from a non-autonomous ruler to a ruler with a pretension to a large amount of land. This is shown by the change from no title at all, to ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ, to ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ. An important change at the very end of Mithradates’ reign is the addition of the title ‘ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ’. This effectively distances the king from the Greek population while also identifying him as their protector. He is not Greek himself but he is a friend of the Greeks and will use his newfound power in their best interest. Combined with the imagery on these coins we do see that there is interest in communicating with the Greek population (and especially the rich, considering the fact that these were tetradrachms). However, we should be careful in identifying this as a message purely to those of Greek heritage.

- The ruler cult did not play an explicit part on the coins themselves, but we do have evidence of drachms with the word ‘ΘΕΟΥ’ on them, giving us cause to at least identify what shape the ruler cult in the Parthian Empire came in and what it could mean for the ruler himself. In this case we know that there was probably something of a ruler cult going on, especially from excavations in Nisa. The ruler cult not only gave the king importance (because his well-being also meant the well-being of the state, and his nearness to the gods gave him prestige) but it also ensured that the survival of his lineage became of essence. This means that if the ruler cult was properly instated, that not only the king, but his family and his offspring (born or not) were ensured of good treatment.
- The king’s beard, which appeared suddenly on Mithradates’ coinage. He went from clean-shaven to having a full beard, which grows even longer on later coinage. It gave him a look of stature and wisdom, and it is a change from a generalized image to a more realistic image that became popular amongst many Hellenistic kings. However, it could go further than that. The Seleucids, whose coinage would have been familiar to many inhabitants of the Parthian Empire and certainly to the Parthian court itself, were also occasionally portrayed with beards. They did this when they made a vow to the gods to win a war. This is possibly also the case with Mithradates, meant as a threat to the Seleucids and a message to the inhabitants of their Empire. It is a reference to the Seleucid practice as well as a more commonly understood image.
- The archer, which is one of the most recognizable elements on Parthian coinage. He may have changed positions every now and then, but it is a very clear image that was probably familiar to anyone who came in contact with the Parthians. It is also a very complex image, because it recalls different cultures. On the one hand, we see an echo of the Persian archer that was present on the darics that were minted from Darius I on. These almost-solid golden coins were used as tribute and gifts and would have spread quite far because of this function. We could imagine these coins still being used as jewelry even though they were no longer valid currency. On the other hand, especially when coupled with the *omphalos*, this figure looks a lot like the Seleucid Apollo. This figure was present on most Seleucid coinage and had been for decades. It would have looked familiar to those who were using centrally distributed coinage before Mithradates entered the scene. The *omphalos* gives it an added layer: that the Arsacids were now in control of the center of the world.
- The last change is not insignificant when compared to the other coinage, but we should try to see it as a change that was in line with the previous changes, and not a radical variation. What we see, apart from the title ‘ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ’ is the image of Herakles on the tetradrachms (which were the first tetradrachms minted under Parthian rule) and Zeus on drachms of the same issue. Herakles, as we have seen, was an important international symbol. He was used on coins from Greece to India and was equally valued all over the regions the Parthians were active in. Herakles was a symbol that would have spoken to both the Greeks in the cities and the inhabitants of Bactria. It is a symbol of strength, determination as well as a callback to Alexander the Great. Zeus was equally versatile, as it was an image that could literally be Zeus but also function as head of a different pantheon.

In the latter part of this paper we also looked at the coinage of Mithradates' immediate successors, Phraates II and Artabanos I. We saw that they continued his legacy in broad strokes. They also used versatile imagery on their coinage that was able to communicate with different parts of the population. Especially striking is the importance of Victory on this coinage. It indicates both a growing importance of that part of the ruler's duties as well as a certain amount of insecurity about the chance of attaining another victory in unruly times.

The final question is: what was the idea of kingship in the Parthian empire, and how was it used by Mithradates I, one of the greatest Parthian kings?

The most important thing in analyzing the material is that coins give us a much more nuanced image of Parthian kingship than was previously thought. Scholars talked about the coins and the audience they had as fairly homogeneous: either a coin was meant for the indigenous Iranians, or it was meant for the Greeks who lived in the cities. These Greeks needed to be swayed to the Parthian side, because otherwise they would prove troublesome in possible conflicts with the Seleucids. However, even on tetradrachms struck in Seleucia (which has often been described as a 'Greek' center) we can identify cultural concepts that were not clear cut at all. The diadem was a useful symbol in Greek, Egyptian and Eastern cultures, making it a hybrid symbol that could speak to anyone; Alexander the Great adopted this signal and gave it a singular meaning. Several epithets and symbols both spoke to the Greek population, but at the same time they distanced the ruler from any clear heritage. The beard that Mithradates started to wear may have seemed like he was disassociating himself from his forebears, but the beard lay in line with Persian iconography as well as war symbolism conveyed by the Seleucids. With exception of a few symbols that were probably aimed at a certain part of the population (such as 'ΘΕΟΣ') most of what we see on Mithradates' coinage could speak to different people at the same time. So instead of saying that Mithradates took on a more 'Greek' identity, we should be saying that Parthian kingship was diverse and intelligent. It was able to target several groups at once in an unstable and violent time when it was necessary to be as inclusive as possible on a short term. We see Mithradates portrayed as a strong king who was not afraid to challenge a hegemonic power, but at the same time did not hold any grudge against those who previously associated themselves with the power he had defeated. He was friendly to the elite in the cities, spoke to the identities of other cultures and still remained a Parthian with a strong heritage.

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## Plates

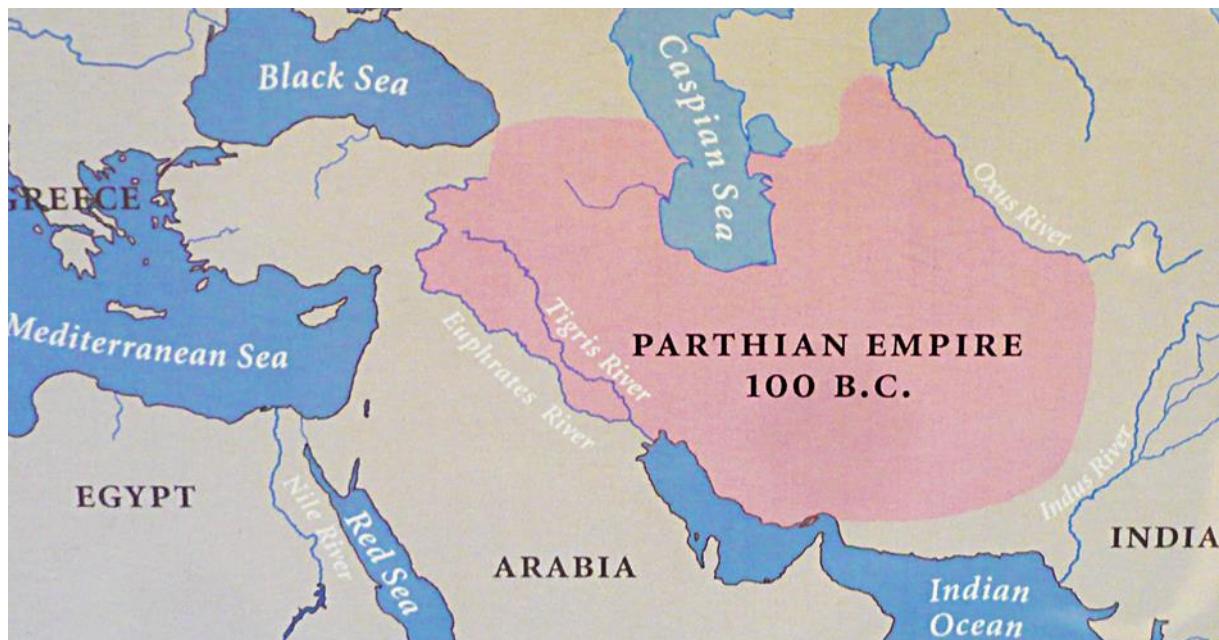


Plate 1. Map issued by the Getty Villa. Source: <http://www.getty.edu/>.



Plate 2. Golden Daric. Reverse, kneeling archer to right, wearing crown and holding staff. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian\\_daric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_daric).



Plate 3. Seleucid 'Apollo' tetradrachm, this one dating to the reign of Antiochos I, ca. 270 BCE. Obverse: male head (king) wearing diadem. Reverse: Male deity (Apollo) holding bow and arrow, sitting on *omphalos*. Source: <http://coinindia.com/galleries-greek-antiochos.html>



PDC 10906

Plate 4, drachm. Obverse: King facing right. Reverse: archer sitting on stool, facing left.

Source: <http://parthia.com/arsaces1.htm>



Plate 5, tetradrachm. Obverse: king, wearing tiara, facing left. Reverse: sitting archer facing left, square row of titles. S28.

Source: <http://parthia.com/mithradates2.htm>



Plate 6, drachm. Obverse: king facing left, wearing *bashlyk*. Reverse: archer sitting on *omphalos*, facing right. S9.

Source: <http://parthia.com/mithradates1.htm>



Plate 7, drachm. Obverse: king facing left, wearing *bashlyk*. Reverse: archer facing right, sitting on *omphalos*. S10.

Source: <http://parthia.com/mithradates1.htm>



Plate 8, tetradrachm. Obverse: king, wearing diadem, facing right. Reverse: male deity (Herakles) facing left, four-lined legend. S13.

Source: <http://parthia.com/mithradates1.htm>.



Plate 9, drachm. Obverse: king facing left, wearing *bashlyk*. Reverse: archer facing right, sitting on *omphalos*. S10.

Source: <http://parthia.com/mithradates1.htm>.



Plate 10, tetradrachm. Obverse: king facing right, wearing elephant skin. Reverse: male deity (Herakles) standing facing, two-line legend.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demetrius\\_I\\_of\\_Bactria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demetrius_I_of_Bactria).